

The Abnormal Mind:
Representations of Deviance and
Madness in Contemporary Fiction

Charlotte Allen

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SUMMARY

This thesis examines the role of the deviant individual in four twenty-first century novels - Sebastian Faulks' *Engleby* (2007), Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003), Zoe Heller's *Notes on a Scandal* (2003) and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005) - and uses a number of recent media figures – Anders Breivik, Jeremy Forrest and Joanna Dennehy – as cultural reference points. The thesis explores the narrative ways in which the deviant individual and their anti-social or transgressive acts are reconfigured in terms of madness and abnormality. Through this process of defining the individual as mad, the thesis examines how these four novels in particular draw attention to profound structures that underpin the way notions of normality and sanity are also defined in contrast.

Through an examination of the socio-cultural representation of diagnostic categories such as personality disorder, and legal clauses such as the diminished responsibility clause of the Homicide Act, the thesis looks at the way contemporary society categorises the human subject in the aftermath of a violent or deviant act, as a means of restoring social order. The thesis goes on to explore the notion of the mad individual being positioned in the role of scapegoat, by being expelled from society through these discursive structures, resulting through this process, in the re-establishment of the contemporary social status quo.

The novels examined in this thesis are integral in facilitating this critical analysis of contemporary culture. The thesis examines the metafictional tropes used by the authors to draw attention to these profound social inequalities, which has the effect of galvanising the reader into reconsidering their own role in the interpretation of and reflection on these events, and crucially, these human subjects.

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The Abnormal Mind: Representations of Deviance and Madness in Contemporary

Fiction Introduction

[S]anity or psychosis is tested by the degree of conjunction or disjunction between two persons where the one is sane by common consent. – R.D. Laing¹

Diagnosing And Defining Difficulties

How do we recognise a mad person? Similarly, how do we recognise the novelistic representation of a mad person? The four novels examined in this thesis - Sebastian Faulks' *Engleby* (2007), Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2003), Zoe Heller's *Notes on a Scandal* (2003) and Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* (2005)² - all feature protagonists who are represented in terms of their psychological abnormality. When beginning to analyse this, complications are encountered immediately because of difficulties with the very terminologies we use to define and describe these individuals and their experiences. The profound lucidity and insightfulness of each of the novels' four protagonists refutes traditional notions of the mad individual – the novels are not depictions of the frenzied, nonsensical ravings of a “crazy” person – which problematises easy definition and categorisation of the characters and their accounts. This initial stumbling block provides an insight into some of the key themes that the novels share, and forms the foundation from which the arguments put forward in this thesis will develop.

One of the fundamental concerns shared by these novels is the complexity of the categorising and labelling of human subjects, and therefore designating the protagonists

¹ R.D. Laing, *The Divided Self*, (London: Penguin Books, 1990) p. 36.

² *Remainder* was first published in 2005 but a revised edition followed in 2006. I use the revised edition throughout.

“mad” is fraught with ideological challenges. Nevertheless, this is the term that is being deliberately and carefully employed in the thesis title, as it seems the most appropriate choice of descriptor that encompasses the nuances of the individual and social context of what is being depicted. Baker *et al* (2010), in their comprehensive exploration of madness in post-1945 fiction, also employ the term deliberately, arguing that it signifies multiple meanings. They justify their use of the word by locating it within the trend of other critical commentators that also choose “madness” when wishing to emphasise cultural - rather than medical - connotations. Baker *et al* quote Geekie and Read who say that by ‘using the term “madness” the experience is wrested from the grip of a select few experts on “schizophrenia” or “psychosis”, and portrayed not as a medical condition with an obscure Greek or Latin derived title, but rather as an aspect of the human condition, about which we can all have our say’.³ “Madness” thus appears to be the most suitable term available that allows us to discuss the psychological complexities of the human subject while avoiding overtly clinical overtones.

However, the widespread scholarly agreement that madness is the most suited term in current use does not negate the complex associations that are made when using it.

“Madness” conjures images of a disturbed and chaotic individual, and its associations with cultural, rather than medical, depictions of psychosis as well as its casual use in the media, mean it is often perceived as a shocking and heavily loaded term. Removing the term from the clinical context also strips it - albeit deliberately in many cases - of the gentler nuances of care and compassion that would be applied when discussing a person who is perceived as mentally ill. This thesis will go on to examine some of the powerful conclusions that can be reached through an interpretation of the discourse of

³ Baker, Charley, Paul Crawford, Brian J. Brown, Maurice Lipsedge, and Ronald Carter. *Madness in post-1945 British and American Fiction*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p3.

and about the mad person, when stripped of these victim-laden clinical inferences. It is, however, important to note from the outset of the discussion, that there is, in fact, no pure and ideology-free terminology available for use when exploring the problem of the conceptualisation of madness. There is a need for caution with any terminology used.

Three of the four novels being examined represent an individual who commits an extremely violent and seemingly mindless crime that is difficult to contextualise and understand. Similar complications arise in the application of the term “psychopath”, which is the descriptor often applied to the perpetrator of this type of crime in an ostensible attempt to denote its severity and to capture the extent of the depravity that must necessarily be present in the subject. The term has been used in several critical studies when describing a number of characters from the novels examined - Prins, for example, mentions both *We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *Engleby* in *Psychopaths: An Introduction* (2013) and Logan (2012) refers to Barbara from *Notes on a Scandal*. The suggestion is that, were these characters subject to real-life diagnostic criteria, they would doubtless be labelled as having a psychopathic disorder. The term “psychopathic disorder” was in fact removed from the Mental Health Act in the heavy amendments that were made in 2007.⁴ While the term “madness” is frequently employed in this thesis, where possible, unless quoting from supporting or critical material, the use of the term “psychopath” has been avoided, for reasons of clarity and to circumvent some of the pitfalls and complications outlined below.

⁴< <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2007/12/section/1>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015] (paragraph 3 of 4)

As Adshead, among others, has pointed out, the term “psychopath” is a sociocultural label as opposed to denoting a specific clinical condition.⁵ There is no clinical set of criteria that, when applied, can result in a person being *diagnosed* a psychopath, with the closest corresponding diagnosis in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) being that of antisocial personality disorder (which will be examined in further detail in Chapter Two). The term psychopath (or, interchangeably, sociopath) is used as a descriptor, with the word, and its derivatives *psychopathic* and *psycho* now commonly used in contemporary colloquial speech and as common currency of the tabloid media.

However, despite psychopathy not being an official clinical or diagnostic term, the notion of psychopathic disorder is nevertheless widely used in a clinical context and in forensic and high security settings. RD Hare’s Psychopathy Checklist – Revised (PCL-R) (1991) provides a 20-point list of affective and interpersonal markers against which an individual – usually a person who has been deemed *criminally insane* - can be assessed and deemed psychopathic. The term psychopath is also employed in the field of criminology. As Brookes and Schissel put it,

forensic psychiatrists now use a well-established method of detecting psychopathology (the psychopathy checklist) to determine and treat what they define as psychopaths and dangerous offenders. The implications for law are that psychiatrists get to decide what constitutes the traits of a psychopath and who gets defined as dangerous.⁶

The interaction between the legal and psychiatric systems regarding the remit of the respective systems with regard to the “mad” offender is examined in further detail in

⁵ Adshead, Gwen, ‘Treatment and Management of Psychopathic Disorder,’ in Heiginbotham, Christopher (ed). *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychopathy: personal identity in mental disorder* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000) pp14-15

⁶ Carolyn Brookes and Bernard Schissel (eds), *Marginality and Condemnation: An Introduction to Criminology*, (Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2008) p7

Chapter Three. While psychopathy is no longer a specific diagnostic term, it is nevertheless used to denote a particular type of “other” with a widely accepted socio-cultural, clinical and criminological meaning. Despite Adshead’s defining of separate terminologies belonging to the realms of psychiatry, the legal system and contemporary media narrative (Adshead, pp.14-15), clear distinctions are impossible due to the blurring of the boundaries between these three systems. Many of the challenges of defining and categorising people - and as a result a vast amount of debates that surround madness in contemporary culture - arise as a site of conflict between these systems. This thesis is largely concerned with the novelistic representation of the notion of madness in the context of psychiatry, the law and the media, and especially so in cases that invoke the borderlines between the systems.

In many of the cases where the terms “madman/woman” or “psychopath” are often used interchangeably, the individual involved is labelled as such because their diagnosis was linked to or triggered by a violent crime. While three of the novels featured in this thesis deal with violent crimes, all four of the novels in fact, question the way in which an individual’s sanity comes under scrutiny when prompted by their criminal activities, resulting in the common central theme of criminality as a form of - or as indicative of - madness. By committing the criminal act, each protagonist is represented - in their depictions in the media, in cultural representations, and often in official discourse - as having breached the boundaries of a legal and social norm. In much of the ensuing discussion that deals with this, the protagonists are referred to in this thesis as deviant or transgressive individuals. The employment of these terms serves to situate the individual in the context of their criminal actions, as opposed to applying an overarching definition of their psychopathological identity. This allows a consideration of society’s response to the crime, and to the individual, as opposed to an acceptance of

the deeply ingrained socio-cultural codes that perpetuate the notion that to commit an extreme crime an individual is necessarily psychopathic. In examining the social response to the act and to the individual, and the ways in which the novels depict the narrative that surrounds this, the thesis explores the interrogation of that formula.

Darian Leader's exploration of the topic in *What is Madness?* (2012) considers madness in terms of its impact on society, suggesting that a person can be 'quietly' mad, experiencing psychosis in a way that is compatible with everyday life, refuting our common notions of what madness is. Leader argues that our current understanding of madness is that which radically disrupts the everyday. In considering the highly profiled and media-reported "mad" individual who is defined as such upon committing a violent crime, Leader invites us to consider the point at which the person becomes – or is labelled – mad:

There is nothing noticeably abnormal about their behaviour until that moment. They may in fact have been a model citizen, responsible, respectable and even-tempered. But, in the time preceding their homicidal act, could we really say that they were not mad? Surely it invites us to think about those instances of madness that are compatible with normal life. This is a quiet, contained madness, until the moment it erupts in the act of violence.⁷

In questioning whether the deviant individual was "mad" prior to their mad act he draws attention to the intricate nature of our current means of psychopathologising transgression. Leader's suggestion that types of madness can be compatible with normal life highlights the complexity of the entire concept as we understand it in contemporary terms and draws attention to the profoundly subjective terminology used. Furthermore it draws attention to the extent to which madness and criminality are intertwined.

⁷ Leader, Darian. *What is Madness?* (London: Penguin, 2012) p9

Leader's questions about the time that precedes the mad act brings into focus a pertinent aspect of the discussion that surrounds madness. The individual comes under social scrutiny and is defined as mad post-homicidal act. While the media articles that commentate on this pervasive aspect of contemporary reality do focus on background "indicators" as a means of reinforcing the image of the individual as a mad person, the vantage point of the discussion is very much reactive to the criminal act. The individual is defined – and, as we will see, diagnosed - by their crime, and this is what informs the way they are represented. The novels examined in this thesis portray the transgressive individual in the formative period prior to the crime, allowing the reader to engage with a different perspective and ultimately to reconsider - as Leader proposes - our very understanding of madness and abnormality.

Shifts in Perspective

The enigma of the human psyche has always offered a diverse area for literary exploration, with examples of representations of madness found in literature throughout the ages. There is a substantial body of work that critically examines and explores the historical representation of mental abnormality. Some critics offer a far-reaching retrospective overview, surveying representations of madness in literature throughout history, from the Greeks to the present-day (Feder, 1980, Reid, 2001; MacLennan, 2012; Saunders and MacNaughton, 2005). Others choose to examine literary representations of madness in a specific era. Harper (1997) departs from other works that posit medieval madness as a metaphor for sinfulness and considers instead literary accounts that reveal madness in the Middle Ages to be an opposition to the social, economic and political institutions of the time. Salkeld (1994) considers madness in the Renaissance, exploring the inner lives of Shakespearean characters and demonstrating the parallel between each character's individual "madness" and the political disorder

that it symbolizes. Ingram (1992) examines literary and non-literary expressions of attitudes towards and experiences of madness from the late seventeenth- to the early nineteenth century. Wiesenthal (1997) looks both at how specific manifestations of madness are represented in literary texts of the nineteenth century and how these representations are interpreted by readers.

Literary studies of madness throughout the ages frequently conceptualise it as a challenge to a social, political and ideological status quo. The findings of this thesis contribute to the body of work by examining the ways in which this happens in novels of the early twenty-first century. I consider the way in which this is structured by looking at how deviance is framed as abnormality and neutralised through attribution either informally to generic defective “madness”, or to a formally recognised mental health condition.

The madness of the literary artist is something that has held fascination since Plato, who believed that creative works arose from moments of “divine frenzy”. Many key literary figures are widely acknowledged as having suffered from a mental illness - including Virginia Woolf, Ernest Hemingway, Sylvia Plath and Kurt Vonnegut - with critical examinations of their works representing a keen interest in gaining biographical insight into the psychological dimension of literary creation.

Towards the end of the twentieth century a number of studies established a direct link between creative artists - with particular emphasis on writers - and madness, stating evidence to indicate a prevalence of mental illness in creative people (Rothenberg, 1990; Andreasen, 1987). Albert Rothenberg summarises his conviction that the thought

processes of creative people can be identified as being different from the thought processes of the remainder of the population;

The major findings to come out of my research are that there are particular and specific thought processes used by creative people during the process of creation; this applies to the entire spectrum of disciplines, areas and media. These special thought processes are the features that distinguish creative people from the rest of us.⁸

A clear “them and us” distinction is established between the cognitive processes of artists and non-artists in this line of thought, establishing a similarity between the thought patterns of “mad” people and those of creatively gifted people.

Andreasen studied the relationship between creativity and mental illness in the 1970s and 1980s, examining whether a cognitive correlation could in fact be identified between people displaying psychosis and creative people (studies primarily included the members of the Writers’ Workshop at the University of Iowa). Ultimately Andreasen outlined evidence that she had identified a high prevalence of mood disorders,⁹ rather than psychosis, in both writers and their first-degree relatives. Creativity is nevertheless acknowledged in her studies as representing ‘divergent thinking’.¹⁰ The creative artists and the “madman” are both defined as being extra-ordinary, and situated outside of the “normal” majority.

The link between madness and creativity, or genius, is often explored in terms of the artistic product perhaps serving as justification for this differentiation of the individual from the rest of society. There is a direct correlation created between the artist’s mental

⁸Rothenberg, Albert. *Creativity & Madness: New findings and old stereotypes*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990) p11

⁹ Andreasen, Nancy C. ‘The relationship between creativity and mood disorders.’ *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience* 10.2 (2008), (p251)

¹⁰ Andreasen, Nancy C. ‘A journey into chaos: Creativity and the unconscious.’ *Mens Sana Monographs* 9.1 (2011), (p42)

state and the work they produce. Rieger (2011) outlines a commonplace belief that madness is almost *necessary* to reach full creative potential; ‘Ironically, the best works of some writers, composed in period of depression, might never have been completed or recognized if they had been more cheerful or optimistic.’¹¹ As the title of Arnold M Ludwig’s *The Price of Greatness* (1995) suggests, mental illness can be seen as a cost or consequence of creative brilliance. Ludwig establishes early on in his examination of the connection between the creative arts and madness that ‘mental illness is not essential for artistic success’.¹² His work nevertheless provides a biographical survey of over 1,000 notable twentieth century individuals, including many high profile literary figures, who have been identified as both mentally abnormal and artistically accomplished.

The focus on the artistic “type” being emotionally, mentally or psychologically abnormal serves as a way of creating an acceptable discourse that establishes the individual as separated from the majority. Although the mental state of artists and celebrities is continually a source of social interest, the investigations that establish a link between madness and creativity have been somewhat replaced by works that acknowledge our contemporary awareness of the ways in which the person suffering mental illness can be stigmatized. The narrative that surrounded the creative artist in these studies operates as a means of creating a scapegoat. I discuss the phenomenon of scapegoating in extensive detail later in the thesis. I have not extended my research to include any information about the mental state of the four authors investigated here.

¹¹ Rieger, Branimir M (ed). *Dionysus in Literature: essays on literary madness*. (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011), p6

¹² Ludwig, Arnold M. *The Price of Greatness: Resolving the creativity and madness controversy*. (New York: Guilford Press, 1995) p7

Rather, my interest is in what these novels reveal to us about the discursive structures surrounding the mentally “abnormal” character and their role in contemporary society.

In his examination of madness in medieval literature, Harper notes an evolution in the way medieval madness is perceived: ‘Twentieth-century discussions of madness in the Middle Ages have tended either to follow or react against a one-sided Victorian version of psychiatric history. Nineteenth-century assessments of medieval attitudes towards madness were often disapproving or patronising.’¹³ In a review of Wiesenthal’s *Figuring Madness in Nineteenth Century Fiction*, Gilman (2000) notes a similar departure in the way in which madness has been conceived in the latter-half of the twentieth century. While works that went before it tackled madness thematically, according to Gilman, Wiesenthal’s work reveals a shift to a more discerning view of the symbiotic relationship between medical and literary madness:

The study of madness in literature has come a long way in the past two decades. No longer understood as the exploration of an autonomous “theme” but as the interface between literary and medical representations of insanity, such studies, when well done, manage to provide both historians of medicine and historians of literature with some greater insight.¹⁴

There are numerous excellent histories of psychiatry available (Porter, 2002; Berrios and Porter, 1995) that offer insight into the very frequent and significant changes that the field underwent in the twentieth-century. A comprehensive examination of the impact of some of these specific changes on literary critical shifts like the one mentioned above by Gilman would prove a fascinating area of further study. One such major change was the ‘release’ of the mad from institutions into the community, which took place from the 1950s. Some (Eisenberg and Guttmacher, 2010) hail this process of

¹³ Harper, Stephen (1997) *The subject of madness: insanity, individuals and society in late-medieval English literature*. PhD thesis, University of Glasgow. P.1

¹⁴ Gilman, Sander L. "Figuring Madness in Nineteenth-Century Fiction (review)." *Victorian Studies* 42.2 (2000): 309-310.

deinstitutionalisation as successful in allowing patients to receive better care.¹⁵ Others (Torrey, 2010) view the move as a significant failure.¹⁶ Szasz (2007) views deinstitutionalisation as ‘the policy and practice of transferring homeless, involuntarily hospitalised mental patients from state mental hospitals into many different kinds of de facto psychiatric institutions’.¹⁷ Szasz’s view represents the notion that while the mentally ill were moved into the community, key socio-cultural roles fulfilled by the institution continued in a different guise.

In *Insanity as Redemption in Contemporary American Fiction: Inmates Running the Asylum* (1995), Barbara Tapa Lupack considers the novelistic examination of different types of institution and the ways in which they thematically explore social, cultural and political non-conformity. Lupack examines the notion that a function of the mad character in the context of the psychiatric institution depicted in the novel can serve to make sense of the “madness” of the contemporary world. Lupack discusses the ways in which twentieth-century American novels represented the psychiatric institution as:

an apt symbol for the organized madness of modern life, particularly for those absurd forces which attempt to deprive the hero of his identity and individuality – ironically, at one time the very measures of his sanity and worth. Madness is both a result of the startling reality and a way of commenting on it. Only one who is out of step with the absurd world, as Roth and other contemporary novelists have defined it, is truly sane – though, since he is at odds with most of society, he is considered insane. And by being out of step, that protagonist is often relegated to the institution.¹⁸

¹⁵ Eisenberg, Leon, and Laurence B. Guttmacher. "Were we all asleep at the switch? A personal reminiscence of psychiatry from 1940 to 2010." *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica* 122.2 (2010): 89-102.

¹⁶ Torrey, E. Fuller. "Documenting the failure of deinstitutionalization." *Psychiatry* 73.2 (2010): 122-124.

¹⁷ Szasz, Thomas. *Coercion as Cure: A critical history of psychiatry*. (New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2009). P.34

¹⁸ Lupack, 'Inmates Running the Asylum: The Institution in Contemporary American Fiction' in Rieger, Branimir M., ed. *Dionysus in literature: essays on literary madness*. (Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011) p172

Lupack's examination of notable twentieth century representations of madness such as Joseph Heller's *Catch-22* (1961) and Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) thematically draws attention to the perception of anti-order and the challenge to bureaucratic institutions as facilitated by madness.

Rieger refers to non-conformist protagonists depicted as rebelling against social constraints as displaying 'anomie'. This representation of insanity in fact transposes the common definition; in contrast with the "madness" of the world around them, the "other" character's perspective is often revealed as the most rational. By operating outside of the mainstream, the actions and discourse of the ostracised mad character can be used to make very poignant comments about the dominant cultural ideologies.

Rieger says:

Anomie, or sociological madness, depicts characters estranged from society's "sane", "normal" or "rational" behaviours.[...]Frequently, a writer utilizes this literary madness to satirize the society which has produced the "mad" individual. A "mad" person, in the Shakespearean wise-fool, "reason-in-truth" tradition, can also utter truths that most people of a supposedly sane society would never observe or verbalize. (Rieger, p7)

One of the dangers of viewing the psychiatric institution as symbolic in this way is that it complicates the socio-cultural conception of the genuinely mentally ill, and could in fact lead to stigmatization and inhibit treatment. The novel has huge potential to reveal, challenge and disrupt the socio-cultural status quo and examine the ways in which accounts that contradict the hegemonic order are represented. Characters such as Kesey's McMurphy and Heller's Yossarian, who raise questions over who or what is in fact "mad" in their respective contexts, are powerful examples of this. However, this literary mode must be tempered by an awareness of its equivalent potential – like any discourse – to misrepresent and marginalise the mental distress of individual sufferers.

The DSM was first published in 1952 and revised six times between then and 2013. This set of psychiatrically prescribed diagnostic disorders has undoubtedly led to an increase of our contemporary awareness of the potential for the stigmatisation of individuals with mental health conditions. We have in turn seen an increasing number of literary representations of specific mental disorders published. Mood disorders such as bipolar disorder are featured in novels such as Patrick Gale's *Notes from an Exhibition* (2007) and Clare Boylan's *Beloved Stranger* (2000). As a social agenda to increase public understanding of conditions such as autism and Asperger's syndrome grows, novels such as Marti Leimbach's *Daniel isn't Talking* (2007) and Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2003) offer fictional accounts that offer the layperson an insight into the perspective of the diagnosed individual and the impact that the disorder can have on them and those around them.

Rieger warns against the dangers of examining fictional representations for these types of insights into specific disorders, purporting that 'such critical procedures can reduce literature's complexity to trite, simplistic observations' (Rieger, p10). Novels that examine particular diagnostic conditions are also time-sensitive. They run the risk of becoming dated with the next revision of the DSM, which can alter the diagnostic criteria of a condition, or remove it from the manual entirely. The converse feature to the risk of becoming dated is that a novelistic examination of particular diagnostic criteria can facilitate a discussion surrounding the validity of the diagnostic categories themselves. This is explored in more detail later in this thesis in relation to the diagnostic criteria of personality disorder which – as a disorder of abnormality itself – promotes a significant reflection on the ways in which we can define mental illness in any capacity.

Why Contemporary Fiction?

In his essay 'Fictional Narrative and Psychiatry', Femi Oyeboode examines representations of madness as physical difference, madness as psychological difference denoted by unusual thinking processes, and madness as linked with violence. All of these modes of representation configure the narrative distancing of the individual from notions of humanity:

One of the reasons insanity is of interest to writers is that already existent in the image of insanity is the implicit difference from others. When this difference is amplified, the result can be grotesque or a parody of what insanity is actually like.¹⁹

Oyeboode's work explores concepts of madness in a way that can be applicable to both literary and clinical scholars. Unsurprisingly, in much of the scholarly material on the psychology, philosophy and clinical accounts of madness, literary allusions can be found. Rather than merely utilising lyrical phraseology borrowed from works of fiction to underline key points in a poignant and poetic way, academic writers often situate fictional accounts of madness alongside real life medical case studies. This suggests both can be perceived as equally valuable in offering an insight into the experience of madness both from an individual and social perspective. Thomas Szasz, for example, traces the medicalisation of the soul back to the sixteenth century, citing *Macbeth* in support of his claims.²⁰ Shakespeare is in fact habitually cited in seminal works on madness, (Prins, 2013, Cleckley, 1982) as are a great number of canonical authors.

It has become common practice for some clinical studies to regard fictional works as helpful sources in support of their findings - as exemplified in the following excerpt

¹⁹ Oyeboode, Femi. *Mindreadings: literature and psychiatry*. (London: RCPsych Publications, 2009). P.42

²⁰ Szasz, Thomas, *The Myth of Mental Illness: Foundations of a Theory of Personal Conduct*. (New York. Harper Perennial, 2010) p.xiv

from a journal article that outlines implications for practice as a concluding note to its examination of gendered representation in accounts of psychopathy (again reinforcing that the removal of the term from diagnostic criteria is not enough to diminish the fascination psychopathy holds as a psychological construct in both a medical and non-medical context):

Practitioners, qualified and in-training, are recommended to respect the educational potential of novels, plays and short stories as much as their text books, certainly in relation to their understanding of the phenomenology of mental disorder and psychopathy in particular.

Fiction informs practitioners but it can inform clients too, and its awareness-raising potential should be considered as part of an overall treatment intervention.²¹

With continually evolving clinical practices and research on the topic of mental disorders proving a mainstay of contemporary culture with which authors of fiction can engage, fiction can symbiotically offer perspectives that can add value to clinical insights. This interdisciplinary approach to an understanding of the complex working of the human psyche is exciting, and encouraging for the growing body of work that is referred to as Health Humanities.

In *What is Madness?* Leader suggests that the individual has vanished from psychiatry and indeed from discussions of psychosis in contemporary discourse, only to be replaced with figures and statistics that represent the human subject as an object to be treated, as opposed to offering an account of the individual's experience (Leader, p4). The International Health Humanities Network has been established to promote a focus on healthiness and wellbeing in society by encouraging the development and inclusion

²¹ Logan, Caroline 'La femme fatale: the female psychopath in fiction and clinical practice', *Mental Health Review Journal* 16:3 (2011) 118 – 127 (p. 126)

of approaches and practises from across a range of disciplines.²² This not only allows an interdisciplinary scholarly approach, but also encourages discourse to be developed that is inclusive of often-marginalised voices such as those of carers and the patient themselves. Crawford *et al* published *Health Humanities* in early 2015 and in 2009 Paul Crawford became the world's first Professor of Health Humanities. The steadily increasing profile of the discipline of Health Humanities reflects an ideological change in the way we view and talk about madness and mental health in contemporary culture. The novels examined in this thesis, as the subsequent chapters will show, raise questions and strongly challenge the pre-conceived notions of madness and the mad individual present in the early twenty-first century. They offer, therefore, through their cultural interrogation, an insight into the contemporary interpretive crisis surrounding madness.

Crawford *et al* have established the Madness and Literature Network – another interdisciplinary forum for the collating and sharing of academic and clinical work - as a means of gathering together resources and experts with a shared interest in madness to encourage collaborative working.²³ In *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction* (2010), Baker *et al* identify two distinct 'types' of madness literature that proved illuminating in the initial planning of this thesis:

Broadly, we see two main functions of madness in fiction. Firstly, there is the kind of story where madness is used as a kind of device, a rhetorical or dramatic motif – madness acting as a kind of vehicle for entertainment. Secondly, there are texts where the theme of madness may have been adopted with provocative, informative or politically minded motives. In this kind of work, the author actively seeks to engage with, and at times subvert, the dominant cultural, social and media-perpetuated public construction of madness (Baker *et al*, p.5).

²² < <http://www.healthhumanities.org/> > [Accessed 20th March 2015]

²³ <<http://www.madnessandliterature.org/>> [Accessed 20th March 2015]

It is this second variety of madness representation that is the central concern of this piece of research, which examines current depictions - that is, in novels both published in the twenty-first century and depicting the very late twentieth- and early twenty-first century. Crucially, the novels contribute to, but also engage with, comment on and challenge, representations of the contemporary. This allows for identification of and a deep engagement with the aforementioned subversion of the *present* dominant socio-cultural ideologies, as opposed to historical accounts of madness that can be contextualised in the psychiatry of the day.

The decision to limit the scope of the contemporary to twenty-first century novels was a difficult one, as there are a number of novels published in the 1990s and earlier, that take madness as their central theme and offer a wealth of potential for literary examination. Many of these accounts are primarily concerned with the individual's *experience* of being or going mad, depicting the severed connection with the widely accepted reality and the impossibility of communication with or habitation of the same social space as the other. Patrick McGrath's *Spider* (1990) offers a frenzied and fast-paced reflection of the anxious thought patterns of a disordered mind and uses its narrative trajectory to explore the experience of the mad outsider on the journey from uncontained disorder to institutionalisation. Similarly, McGrath's depiction of the relationships between staff and patients in *Asylum* (1996) explores the themes of obsession and the intersubjective process of going mad in response to emotional stimuli, questioning the implicit – or, as Leader may put it, untriggered - madness in everyone. Ian McEwan's *Enduring Love* (1997) profiles the condition of de Clerambault's syndrome, depicting the homoerotic delusions of an individual's imagined romantic communication with another person. While all of these novels

consider the relationship of the mad individual with the other, and the disparity between their reality and that shared by the rest of society, they do so in a way that thrills or invokes fear – of the alienating process of going mad, or of being a victim of the obsessions of the “mad” other.

Novels such as Chuck Palahniuk’s *Fight Club* (1996) and Bret Easton Ellis’s *American Psycho* (1991) establish thrilling narratives set in masculine spaces in which the authors explore the violence of the experience of psychosis. Through this they also explore revolution, offering indictments of the madness and disorder of contemporary society. Like McEwan’s representation of de Clerambault’s syndrome, these novels can be said to offer fictional accounts of real life mental conditions – albeit pseudo disorders. Psychopathy features in *American Psycho* - which as we have already seen is in fact a cultural variant of a type of personality disorder. The notion of multiple personality is offered as the ‘twist’ of *Fight Club* - the protagonist of this novel can be said to be suffering from a Dissociative Identity Disorder (previously commonly known as Multiple Personality Disorder). However, in doing so in a manner that dramatically foregrounds sex, violence, masculinity and excess, these novels can be said to perpetuate many of the media-fuelled myths surrounding these very real diagnostic disorders.

If we consider Baker *et al*’s dual modes of madness fiction, we can see that these novels in fact fall into the first category of accounts that utilise madness as a vehicle to excite and entertain. The novels scrutinised in this thesis all entail a shift away from the experience of madness on an individual level, and examine it from a systemic viewpoint (this will be expanded on further below). Rather than capitalising on particular mental health conditions, the novels look at how madness is represented - especially in connection with the disciplines of psychiatry, the legal system and the media - in

contemporary discourse and what this reflects about our perceptions of the mad individual and about human subjectivity in general. In this way, they can be said to be more concerned with the process of representation as a means of commenting on the state of contemporary culture than on what is being represented as a form of entertainment. The novels examined were all published post-2000, with the most recent – *Engleby* – published in 2007. Whether the shift between the 1990s and post-2000 fiction from thematic to political examination of madness can be rooted in the history of the time is a potential question for further research. The central concern of this thesis, however, is an examination of the ways in which contemporary notions of madness are being probed, and what these sceptical and questioning accounts reveal about the role of madness in contemporary society.

Why ‘Representations?’

This thesis considers representations of madness – in the plural. This is not only because the depictions of madness in multiple contemporary novels are considered. The plural is also employed because the novels considered are not only representations of the mad other, they also take as their subject matter the diverse and varied ways contemporary society discusses, understands and portrays madness. Furthermore the thesis considers a number of real-life media narratives, paying particular attention to the story-telling and fictional conventions used by the media in their representation of the “madness” of the transgressive individual.

The novels consider how these individuals are located and contextualised within society in general, and specifically within the three systems of psychiatry, the law and the media. By depicting the way the characters are represented as individuals ‘processed’ by these systems, the novels pose searching questions about the structures of the

systems themselves. In *Engleby* an overview of the personality and character flaws of the protagonist is represented through the illustration of a medical document that serves the purpose of diagnosing the character with a mental disorder following his criminal actions, offering an interrogation of the way in which the contemporary psychiatric system assesses and subsequently categorises people. In *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the novel tracks the protagonist's progress through the legal trial that serves the function of assigning consequences to his actions. In dramatising the legal process as well as the reactions and opinions of the community, the novel draws attention to the litigiousness of American contemporary culture, and to the obsessive determination to attain answers and arrive at an understanding of extreme anti-social human behaviour through the workings of the legal system. In *Notes on a Scandal*, the titular event is represented through Barbara's subjective narrative account, which in turn depicts the media – operating in the role of a dramatic chorus – with the fictionalised tabloid articles serving as a metonym for the entirety of the contemporary mediatised narrative of scandal. In these ways the various authors displace the experience of madness from being the central and titillating concern of their novels, and instead represent *both* the individual perspective and an overview of the varying discourses of the 'madness industry'.²⁴

The novels all exploit the literary tradition of the unreliable narrator. *Engleby* and *Remainder* both provide first person retrospective accounts offered by the "mad" protagonists, whose respective narrative voices become increasingly difficult to identify with as the novels progress, producing a tension for the reader regarding their ability to relate to the character. The unreliable first-person narrative draws attention to the

²⁴ Ronson, Jon. *The Psychopath Test: A journey through the madness industry*. (London: Picador, 2012)

reader's dependence on the narrator's version of events, but challenges how far a reader is willing or able to identify with the anomalous individual. Through this narrative tension the novels pose questions about the configuration of madness and notions of normality and abnormality as social constructs, or at least as serving a social function, which will be examined throughout the thesis.

Notes on a Scandal and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* both offer accounts that are reported by narrators who boast a coveted proximity to the deviant individual, and represent their version of events through this vantage point. This narrative style poses questions about the social function of madness and abnormality, but also challenges the reader to consider the authority of claims about the experiences and intentions of the other. While they are *not* the transgressive individuals that the respective titles declare to talk about or annotate, the narrators of these novels both have distinctive voices that are equally as unreliable and alienating as those in Faulks' and McCarthy's novels. This splits the reader's focus in their analysis of the characters – with both the protagonists and the narrators necessitating psychopathological scrutiny.

Interestingly, the split between the narrative choices corresponds to the gender of the authors. The two male authors have used male narrators depicted as entirely isolated and self-sufficient characters that are at odds with the norms of society. The two female authors have depicted female narrators who consider the complexities of the social interactions and relationships between two “abnormal” individuals. All four novels are very much concerned with the communication between the mad individual and the other, or the social group. The male authors, however, represent this through a severing of the connection between the individual and the society he exists within, with the respective narrator-characters' theoretical experiments coming into conflict with social constraints. The female authors, on the other hand, are concerned with madness as a

toxic interrelation between two people that is both damaged and damaging, and at no point depict their transgressive characters in isolation from the relationship that is being represented. Gender is a prevailing theme of all four of the novels, and is central to the discussion in most chapters of this thesis, but particularly so in Chapter Four.

The narrative instability draws attention to how unstable the accounts are and also to how unstable our contemporary notions of the mad other are. Rather than merely reflecting the uncertainties and anxieties of the subject of madness in twenty-first century culture, these novels – as this thesis will show – continually probe and interrogate the ways in which we define madness and, through these definitions, categorise people. The passivity of the reading process is challenged without exception, with all four of the authors employing a range of techniques in the process of challenging the reader's response to the representation of the mad individual and the depiction of the contemporary social group.

Heller's Barbara and Shriver's Eva proclaim to provide *Notes on a Scandal* or to 'Talk About Kevin', outlining the criminal events as holding foremost significance and serving as the narratives' most enthralling feature. However, they both displace the alluring acts of deviance from the heart of their respective narratives, in favour of establishing their own personal crises in response to them. Through a process of therapeutic exploration, both women ultimately arrive at resolutions that position them as occupying fundamental roles, and as being in positions of control as the narratives move forward. This narcissistic prioritisation mirrors the disregard for the other that underpins the psychopathological definitions of the transgressive characters of concern. While they ostensibly provide the accounts they promise to, the authors' employment of flawed narrator-characters highlights the discursive biases tied up with the process of dramatically proclaiming a crisis and offering a narrative resolution.

Dis-order of the Mind

The 1983 Mental Health Act defines mental disorder as ‘any disorder or disability of the mind’²⁵. While this loose definition offers a wide and encompassing scope that accounts for the diversity of the varying conditions of the human psyche, as we have seen, and even at this fundamental level, the language used is problematic. Dis-order necessarily implies an order that has been disrupted or disturbed, implying in turn a norm or standard that is paradigmatic of mental health. The very nature of mental illness, or madness, is therefore established in a way that situates the diagnosed individual at a disadvantage by comparing them pejoratively to the ambiguous, psychologically “healthy”, average person, without offering any defining parameters that illustrate the normal “ordered” mind.

One of the primary premises established in this thesis is the consideration of a reversal of this systematic defining of the abnormal person in contrast with the norms. Instead, it can be suggested that the contemporary configuration of madness in fact serves to define what is normal by delineating that which is unfamiliar, strange or threatening to the group as abnormal. In defining the individual that exhibits unwanted or unwarranted behaviours as abnormal, that individual is thus - via this process of defining - expelled from the boundaries of the social collective through the means of defining them as abnormal. In this way the norms of the group are reinforced and the behaviour that incites fear or apprehension is effectively neutralised.

The thesis examines in detail four twenty-first century novels and one detailed high-profile media case study (although examples from other media figures are also drawn

²⁵ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1983/20/section/1> [Accessed 23rd April 2015] (paragraph 2 of 4)

upon) that depict the deviant and “mad” individual. An examination of the explicit and implicit narrative strategies used reveals how the mad individual is continually defined in contrast with the norms of the group in contemporary representation. The thesis demonstrates the techniques used by the authors of the novels as a means of revealing these social structures, and entering into an interpretive dialogue with their reader to stimulate new ways of thinking about the aspects of society that are being represented and challenged. Each chapter foregrounds one of the novels – although often draws on examples from the other profiled works. The aim is to provide an analysis of the narrative ways in which the novels deal with the three systems already outlined – psychiatry, the law and the media – which formulate the basis of the madness industry. The initial chapter deals with the media case study, which will be discussed at the end of the introductory chapter following a discussion of each of the novels and their corresponding chapters in turn.

With such recent publication dates there is a limited amount of academic writing that has been published on the four novels, and so this thesis contributes to the body of critical material on contemporary fiction in general, and these four novels in particular. Furthermore the thesis draws parallels between the ways in which the four novels comment on the treatment of madness in contemporary society by raising questions and highlighting social anomalies and inconsistencies. The novels foreground the expectation on the reader to play an active role in this process. In this way, these four novels can be said to be indicative of a wider trend in contemporary literature that highlights the socio-political power of the novel form by providing an arena for public discussion.

Engleby

Sebastian Faulks' *Engleby* follows the eponymous first person narrator throughout university, with retrospective reflections on childhood and school days. Mike Engleby's narrative style is immediately uncomfortable to follow, with his lack of self-awareness revealed through his misinterpretations of others' perceptions of him. In the final year of university a female student that Engleby has described in obsessive detail goes missing. Engleby's involvement in the disappearance is deliberately clouded by his alleged inability to remember what happened. Engleby leaves university and after several years, during which he builds a successful journalistic career, a body is found. The ensuing press conference triggers a memory in which Engleby describes his abduction of the girl, and, after being arrested for her murder, recounts beating her to death and breaking her leg with a piece of concrete before burying her body. The narrative at this stage shifts to a present tense description of the resulting court case, through which Engleby is psychologically assessed and is ultimately diagnosed with a personality disorder. The novel examines in detail the diagnostic process and through a portrayal of the role of psychiatry in a legal context, facilitates an engagement with the current "mad or bad" debate.

Not surprisingly - as it was the most recently published of the four novels - there is the least amount of critical material available on *Engleby*. Faulks is best known for his work set in the period of World War 1, and critics seemingly favour his French trilogy (*The Girl at the Lion d'Or* (1989), *Birdsong* (1993) and *Charlotte Gray* (1999)) for literary exploration. Madness is in fact a theme that features in many of Faulks' novels, for example in the Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) represented as a consequence of military service in World War 1 or the depression and anxiety that plagues Piotr in *A Fool's Alphabet* (1992). Faulks touches on the madness of

contemporary reality in *A Week in December* (2009) with the inhabitants of the ‘Barking Bungalow’ satirising reality television shows such as *Big Brother* before poignantly depicting the tragic full scale psychotic breakdown that is televised internationally as a form of entertainment.

Human Traces sees Faulks devote an entire novelistic work to questions of the way the mind works through an exploration of psychiatry in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century. *Engleby*’s creation was in fact a by-product of the research Faulks had conducted for *Human Traces* and was described by the author as a ‘portal into the present’ bringing his fictional subject matter up to the present day.²⁶ *Engleby* however, is not as inconsequential as this description, and in fact the very minimal amount of academic work available on the novel, implies. The novel offers a powerful interrogation of the developmental progress of the legal and psychiatric systems of the late twentieth-century up to the present day, as well as an account of the complex nature of a personality disordered individual. Through this the novel poses many questions about what we understand about madness and crime and about the definition and categorisation of the abnormal ‘other’. Despite being somewhat overshadowed by a number of Faulks’ other works, *Engleby* should not be underestimated and contains important insights into the representation of madness in a contemporary context.

Perhaps one of the reasons for the novel attracting little critical attention is that, at first glance, the novel’s deployment of textual layers and depiction of a detailed diagnostic report and account of the court case, seemingly provides answers to the questions that the novel poses. Mike Engleby is an enigmatic character, but when we are provided with a full diagnostic profile of his personality disorder, it is as though we are given a key that answers the enigma. However, as this thesis will argue, Faulks subtly creates a

²⁶< <http://www.sebastianfaulks.com/index.php/engleby/> > [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

tension surrounding the process of an individual's behaviour raising questions to which society must provide answers, and it is precisely this diagnosing, categorising and above all *reading* people that the novel probes. The chapter that I published in *Fatal Fascinations: Cultural Manifestations of Crime and Violence* (2013) endeavours to offer a critical analysis of these aspects of the novel, and is expanded upon in Chapter Two. This chapter is one of the first pieces of critical material written on *Engleby* to date. While a number of articles and books cite *Engleby*, the chapter in *Fatal Fascinations* is the first extensive piece of academic writing on the novel that has been published.

The second chapter of this thesis examines the diagnostic category of personality disorder, as the disorder that most suitably epitomises a number of the paradoxes of contemporary representations of madness. The chapter opens by exploring the conceptualisation of personality, seeking to identify a normal or “ordered” personality against which to contrast a disordered one. In doing so it argues that while notions of uniqueness and individuality are foregrounded in contemporary discourse, these are in fact complicated by the deeply social function of personality and personality disorder. Within the definitions of personality traits there is an implied pathological degree of manifestation of these traits, which serves to situate individuals who display particular behaviours at the extreme ends of a spectrum. As Trethowan and Sims (1983) put it, offering a distinction between the way personality is perceived by the self and by the other:

Personality may be either considered subjectively i.e. in terms of what the [person] believes and describes himself as an individual, or, objectively in terms of what an observer notices about his more consistent patterns of behaviour [...] If we describe a person as having a ‘normal’ personality, we use the word in a statistical sense indicating that various personality traits are present to a broadly normal extent, neither to gross excess nor extreme

deficiency. Abnormal personality is, therefore, a variation upon an accepted, yet broadly conceived, range of personality.²⁷

Despite a number of theoretical attempts to define a “normal” personality (Trethowan and Sims, 1983, Allport, 1937), it remains an abstract and generally undefined term. Abnormal personality, on the other hand, constitutes an official medical diagnostic definition and has been further divided into ten distinct categories of personality disorder, each with its own defining criteria. In trying to contextualise personality disorder in terms of its “ordered” counterpart, the chapter shows the absence of a norm against which pathology can be defined, and demonstrates instead that norms are circumscribed by the act of naming extreme traits and behaviours as “disorder”. Gross reflects on the interrelatedness of the terms and invokes the indefinite nature of the boundary between them:

Clearly, normality and abnormality are two sides of a coin: each can be defined only in relation to the other. Also, implicit within this statement is the assumption that it’s possible, and meaningful, to draw the line between normal and abnormal. Different criteria for defining normality/abnormality propose how and where the line can be drawn.²⁸

Disordered personality and anti-social behaviour are profoundly interrelated; demanding a consideration of the ideologies that may underpin how and where, as Gross states, the line is drawn between the categories. After ascertaining the social function of personality disorder - as a symbolic rejection of socially undesirable behaviours - the chapter goes on to discuss the debates that surrounded the diagnostic category in the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century surrounding its place in the medical profession. Questions of which

²⁷ Trethowan and Sims in Prins, Herschel. *Psychopaths: An Introduction* (Hampshire: Waterside Press, 2013) p.31

²⁸ Gross, Richard *Psychology: The Science of Mind and Behaviour Fifth Edition* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005) p.758

discipline should be responsible for the management of personality disordered individuals if not the medical profession, are raised, and the cyclical nature of the “mad or bad” debate is considered.

Faulks’ depiction of a personality disordered individual sheds light on and exemplifies the disorder, offering a profound insight into the thoughts and behaviours that are associated with the label. However, this thesis proposes that Faulks goes further than offering a fictional representation of the ‘type’ of individual at the centre of the contemporary social discussion. His representation of the medical and legal profession also raises questions about the ways in which contemporary culture categorises people and facilitates his reader’s engagement with the debate. Through the use of metafictional tropes and a challenging narrative voice, Faulks draws attention to the role of the reader in the process of defining and judging the character. Furthermore, as Chapter Two will demonstrate, his use of different character voices and textual mediums in the novel challenges the very notion of ‘reading’ the other, by destabilising contemporary epistemological claims.

Reference is made to three distinct versions of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) throughout this thesis. The manual – which is the primary handbook used by diagnostic clinicians and other mental health professionals in America and increasingly in the UK and across the world – is currently in its fifth edition, with the continual revisions of the manual proving both illuminating and challenging to this thesis. The need to redefine, re-label and re-categorise again reveals the complexity of the terms used to define particular disorders and highlights the fluidity associated with comprehending and labelling madness in contemporary society. The challenge was posed by the need to select the most appropriate of the revised editions to refer to. The DSM-V, published in 2013, offers the most up to date

overview of the state of the contemporary mental health system, and is therefore fundamental to any discussion of modern socio-cultural representation. In the new edition the 'axis' method of coding mental disorder (which was established to ensure disorders such as personality disorder received adequate clinical and research attention) has been removed and a new methodology that examines conditions requiring further study has been proposed. Overall, however, the fundamental criteria for diagnosing and categorising personality disorders in DSM-V is the same as that outlined in DSM-IV-TR (2000), with the model of ten distinct categories of personality disorder retained.²⁹ It would make sense then, to cite from the most up-to-date version of the handbook. However, while this thesis leans heavily on work from the social sciences and the disciplines of law and psychology, it strives to be, first and foremost, a piece of literary criticism. The DSM-IV-TR was the prevailing handbook used to inform clinical practice after its publication in 2000 and therefore is the edition that is primarily alluded to when making comparison between what is depicted in Faulks' work of fiction and the reality with which it engages and confronts, of the time that the novel (and in fact all four novels examined in the thesis) was published. While it is the DSM-III-R (1987) that is cited in *Engleby* due to the novel's chronology, the novel itself can be said to track the historical development of the mental health system in order to comment on its modern condition. Effort has been taken to clearly denote which version is being used at any given time.

We Need to Talk About Kevin

Like *Engleby*, Lionel Shriver's *We Need to Talk About Kevin* similarly examines the psychological foundation of an individual following a horrific violent crime, but from

²⁹ <http://pro.psychcentral.com/2013/dsm-5-changes-personality-disorders-axis-ii/005008.html> [Accessed 12th September 2013]

the narrative perspective of the individual's mother. The novel adopts an epistolary form to create a one-way correspondence from Kevin's mother Eva, to his father, who – the novel's conclusion reveals – has been killed by Kevin, alongside Kevin's sister, classmates, a teacher and a cafeteria worker. The letters adjoin the narrative of Eva's visits to Kevin in a juvenile detention centre with her maternal memories that track his life from conception to the day of the massacre. The novel portrays the legal consequences of Kevin's actions, and focuses both on the community's response following the event, and on Kevin's formative years leading up to the shooting as an examination of any causal factors that can be identified. The narrative considers the "nature-nurture" debate, questioning whether an individual is born "evil" or whether their actions are a result of psychological damage caused (primarily) by inadequate parenting.

Shriver's novel makes reference to the child development theories that dominated the twentieth-century, considering the notion that an individual's persona is the product of their parenting. By positioning this in a legal context the novel implies a need to consider the causal factors and the attribution of blame. The novel considers the hypothesis that Kevin's homicidal act was a result of inadequate or affectionless mothering, developing a tension between either side of the debate and thus positioning the reader in the role of making a judgement on the characters' actions and personalities. The novel's narrative voice offers the revered perspective of a mother's insight into the deviant character and makes indirect claims to indicate that madness is an inborn quality. The novel, however, continually undermines its own claims to offer an equally compelling counter-argument. In addition to the thematic borderlines invoked throughout the course of the novel, Shriver carefully constructs and plays with the borderline between narrator and character, and between accounts of the self and

descriptions of the other. Shriver reveals the complexities of the attempts to provide a definitive narrative surrounding the psychopathic character, and in doing so draws attention instead to the totalising discourses that make claims to be able to do so.

The novel received much critical attention following Shriver's success as the winner of the 2005 Orange prize for fiction, and again following the novel's adaptation into film in 2011. Critical perspectives follow the novel's narrative trajectory of an examination of the impact of the maternal relationship, and naturally engage with these central themes of the book. Much of the writing on the novel is in relation to Eva, contextualising the eponymous protagonist within the questions raised by the novel about child development and motherhood (Muller 2008, Wingfield 2007). While the two characters are, by design, inextricable from one another, very few commentators on the novel examine the character of Kevin in isolation from his mother, despite the fact that the reverse – the character of Eva alone - is often considered. Kevin is postulated as an event, as opposed to a character or an individual with a distinct identity, with the conversation 'about Kevin' formulating the novel's primary theme and therefore displacing the ostensible need to analyse Kevin's character traits. This thesis examines the implication of this fictional strategy employed by Shriver to highlight the contemporary concern with seeking to apportion blame or to establish causality for the events that have occurred. This in turn draws attention to the removal of the transgressive individual from the centre of the debate, reframing them as something that can be contextualised and therefore managed.

An attempt to discuss the novel without exploring the implication of the relationship between mother and child would be impossible, and this thesis certainly does not overlook the importance of these themes. Nevertheless, the fact that the representation of motherhood - rather than the representation of madness - has dominated the critical

perspective illuminates the assumptions and the priorities of the prevailing discourses on contemporary reality. In addition to the consideration of motherhood, psychopathy and the representation of madness and the legal system, this thesis strives to consider overall the ways in which Shriver subtly draws attention, not only to these principal themes but to the ways they are dealt with discursively. The novel's title draws attention to the need to 'talk about' these issues, but this thesis argues that this also indicates that the *process* of 'talking' - of contemporary communications on these central topics - is also what is being examined.

Chapter Three considers the categorisation of the abnormal other in a legal context and looks at the theoretical provisions in place to account for madness in relation to crime. Deviant behaviour used to diagnostically qualify someone as having a personality disorder raises questions about the definitions of madness or criminality. Crime as a mental illness criterion amalgamates the legal system and the psychiatric system, complicating the social management of that individual's behaviour. The chapter considers the fictional representation of the impact mental disorder has on criminal responsibility and examines the point at which the legal system and the psychiatric system are forced to interact.

The chapter observes the representation of the role of the psychiatrist and the psychiatric defence in court proceedings when an individual's legal sanity is under scrutiny. Both Faulks and Shriver examine the litigiousness of contemporary culture and the process of defining the impact of mental disorder on a person's legal accountability for their criminal actions. Mike Engleby and Kevin are both defined as mad as a result of the extremity of their deviant actions. Where Engleby's disorder is clearly demarcated, however, Kevin's is not. His psychopathy is culturally implied, and the implication of his madness on the legal proceedings raises questions about the

symbolic power associated with the mere supposition of mental disorder that pervades contemporary social systems.

The creation and subsequent blurring of borderlines that result from the process of classification is fundamental here. As we will see, discourses on deviance primarily locate the transgressive individual in liminal spaces, with the centre defined by its difference to these “abnormalities”. The novels in this thesis engage with contemporary reconsiderations of this. As Jencks (2003) puts it:

Perpetually fresh questions are raised about the relationship between the core of social life and the periphery, the centre and the margins, identity and difference, the normal and the deviant, and the possible rules that could conceivably bind us into a collectivity.³⁰

The margins between categories prove problematic and give rise to the prevailing questions that are the concern of modern culture, for example, whether an individual can be considered “mad or bad”, and the point at which we can determine the borderline between insanity and immorality. Similarly, the division between the legal categories of adulthood and childhood draws attention to the seeming arbitrariness of these delineations.

The chapter explores the concept of “diminished responsibility” in relation to the boundary that has been created between the legal categories of murder and manslaughter, predicated on the person that killed having an abnormality of mind. This is complicated by the nature of personality disorder diagnoses or psychopath labels being characterised by a difference in outlook and perception. The lack of expressions of remorse and empathy associated with the diagnoses leads to the perception that a psychiatric defence can be manipulated to achieve preferable consequences for the

³⁰ Jencks, Chris. *Transgression*, (London : Routledge, 2003) p.5

criminal individual. This conflates the amplified representations of both the nefarious individual and the limitations of the current psycho-legal relationship.

After establishing the difficulties of the process of judging the thoughts, feelings and behaviours of the markedly other, the chapter goes on to consider the consequences of the decision to label someone either insane or criminal. The representations of the disordered individuals in *Engleby* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* take into account notions of remorse. They raise questions of how, if psychopaths fail to express empathy and to recognise the wrongness of their actions, an appropriate course of action can be selected. Furthermore, the novels consider the efficacy of a punitive recourse to imprisonment or treatment, urging their reader to contemplate the purpose of the criminal consequences. The aim of treating an abnormal individual is, by implication, to normalise, demanding ultimately the representation of a persona that is more favourable to society. The impossibility of the objective measurement of this however, obscures the process, and once diagnosed and labelled, the individual becomes defined by their condition. As Gross states, using schizophrenia as an example,

While medical diagnosis usually focuses only on the damaged or diseased parts of the body, psychiatric diagnosis describes the *whole person* – someone doesn't 'have' schizophrenia but *is* schizophrenic. This represents a new and total identity (Gross, p762).

Gross notes that the text revision of the DSM that occurred in 2000 (DSM-IV-TR) aims to reject labelling and recommends the alternative; 'an individual with schizophrenia'. It is nevertheless difficult to modify such ingrained cultural modes of communicating. The consequence of the psychiatric defence therefore, whether this is perceived as having been achieved by design or as a result of a mind so disordered that it cannot be

described as normal in a legal context, is ultimately a seemingly irrevocable redefinition of identity.

Notes on a Scandal

Zoe Heller's *Notes on a Scandal* tells the story of an affair conducted by Sheba Hart, a married teacher, and Steven Connolly, her pupil. Steven is fifteen when the sexual relationship begins, meaning that the couple are in breach of the legal and moral boundary between childhood and what is deemed sexually consenting adulthood. The novel is narrated by Sheba's colleague and friend Barbara Covett, who contrasts her personal narrative with the publicised version of events espoused by the media. When the affair is discovered Sheba is dismissed from her role as a teacher and forced to leave her family home. The differentiation of the narrative styles reveals the ways in which sexual transgression and its consequences are represented and discussed in contemporary social discourse.

Notes on a Scandal also generates a great deal more critical attention that considers the psychopathology of the narrator-character, than that which considers the deviant individual who has committed the crime at the heart of the plot. While the crime detailed in *Notes on a Scandal* is non-violent, less severe in terms of its impact on society and in many ways debatably even a criminal act at all, this thesis argues that it is equally important in considering the representation of contemporary deviance and abnormality. Scholars have discussed Barbara's malign character (Logan, 2011) and her sexuality (Carroll, 2012) at equal, if not greater length than Sheba's scandal, and she is frequently defined as a "mad" character. Again the novel's title draws attention to the author's decentring of the dramatic event in favour of an annotation of *how* the event is conveyed – the reader is signposted to consider the "notes", rather than the

scandal itself. Arguments can be made for Barbara's character being the more dominant and therefore more compelling as an explanation for why her character elicits deeper critical analysis than Sheba's. It is precisely the fragility of Sheba's character in contrast with Barbara's, however, that supports an examination in Chapter Four of this thesis, of the novel's comments on the gender biases of modern life and formulates the basis of the discussion of femininity as represented in the novel and the media.

The novel was also adapted into a film, with Richard Eyre's directorial choices coming under scrutiny for what they imply about the priorities of twenty-first century representation. In his examination of what constitutes masculinity and victimisation in the media, Prickett (2011) points out that the 2006 film production 'decides that a pseudo-lesbian *Fatal Attraction*-esque plot is much more important, and believable, than an adult woman abusing a teenage boy'.³¹ The hypothetical gender reversal of the roles depicted in *Notes on a Scandal* is considered in this thesis with the aim of revealing and amplifying the social gender imbalances and media prejudices that are probed by the novel.

Notions of feasibility have also been noted in relation to the text. Faulks introduces his profile of Barbara as one of his 'villain' characters in the BBC-commissioned book and television series *Faulks on Fiction* (2011) by describing the precarious borderline between a believable storyline and a fascinating character:

Oddly enough, this credibility strain adds an extra level of tension. There is not only the slow motion car crash of Sheba's life, there is the secondary anguish of wondering whether Barbara can make it credible to us; and this is what draws us most powerfully to her: she holds our entertainment in her hands.³²

³¹ Prickett, Matthew B 'Who is the Victim Again? Female Abuse of Adolescent Boys in Contemporary Culture' in Wannamaker, Annette (ed), *Mediated Boyhoods: Boys, Teens, and Young Men in Popular Media and Culture*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2011) p51

³² Faulks, Sebastian. *Faulks on Fiction* (London: BBC Books, 2011) p362

Heller deftly plays with this tension and in doing so draws her reader's attention to the ways in which narrative structures are created. While considering representations of Barbara's character, this thesis foregrounds the often overlooked representation of Sheba, and the literary techniques deployed by Heller as a tool for questioning mediated contemporary reality.

Chapter Four considers the relationship between the collective and the deviant individual in further detail, examining the discursive strategies adopted by the media, as claiming to represent the voice of the social group. The chapter explores the novel's depiction of the mediated commentary surrounding the ways in which the transgressive individuals are contemporaneously defined in terms of their mental experience following a criminal act. This is perceived as ultimately allowing the act to be understood and the antagonist to be managed. The media plays a role in redefining the transgressor in terms of abnormality as a means of re-establishing the norms of the group. This chapter, employing support from René Girard's theories, considers this as revealing a process of scapegoating – the deviant individual's peripheral position can be said to be exploited, using their criminal act as impetus to expel them from the group as a means of restoring social harmony. This is concealed through the discursive strategies that are used in the representation. The chapter strives to highlight a number of these strategies by considering the displaced view of the media as represented through the novelistic depiction of the contemporary phenomenon of scandal. The chapter begins by briefly outlining Girard's theory of scapegoating, before going on to demonstrate how his 'stereotypes of persecution' can be identified in Heller's *Notes on a Scandal* revealing the scapegoating mechanism at work.

The chapter then considers Heller's representation of the relationship between the media and the public, with the media professing to depict and respond to contentious issues on the public's behalf but in doing so creating a frenzied moral panic about the state of various aspects of contemporary society. The media strives to strike a balance between acting as self-appointed voice of the majority and establishing the role of an investigative entity that purports to reveal aspects of society that are hidden. The media holds a large amount of social power in that it occupies a position of being able to present information to the masses but also claims to represent the attitudes and feelings of the group. Notions of what constitutes normal and abnormal come into play again here, with the media ideally positioned to assert social norms through the denouncing of that which it deems abnormal. Heller's novel depicts this and explores the tension between narrative and audience by contrasting media narrative with the novel form. The chapter examines this exchange and looks at the different ways audiences respond to the scandalous stories that are pitched, and the factors that influence the reader's response.

Through an examination of the gendered codes that can be identified in the narratives, the chapter exemplifies the communicative imbalance in the representation of norms and abnormalities, and of sanity and madness. The novel highlights the differing tones in the representations of men and women in relation to deviant behaviour and madness. Through this we can identify women as being covertly represented as benign, lacking the social power to warrant a moralistic, outraged response of alarm to her transgressive act. We can view woman as scapegoat – in that any threat her acts may pose are discursively neutralised by a reconfiguring of her character in terms of abnormal femininity. The novel reveals this mechanism at play through its narrative challenge to

contemporary feminine representation, and in this way we can consider the oppressive and patriarchal symbolic codes in operation in contemporary discursive culture.

The chapter examines the depiction of the mental and emotional experience of the two women at the centre of the novel. Sheba's representation through the narrative and the media stories that are described allow us to witness her descent from a coveted social position of "normality" to an exiled abnormality and subsequently consider her a victim of the scapegoat mechanism. Barbara, on the other hand, is represented as extremely other and as a social anomaly. The novel explores the borderline between sympathy and empathy – which is in fact an essential aspect of the psychopathologising of the mad individual – and through representing her struggle to form bonds with others, forces the reader to question their own empathic responses. Sheba – defined in terms of her femininity – is easy to feel sorry for, but the boundary-pushing nature of her sexual misdemeanour complicates empathy and raises uncomfortable questions about the limits of normal sexual desire, and abnormal attraction. Barbara's narrative tone and skewed observations, however, preclude easy identification. Faulks believes that responses to Barbara's character, however, are based on a rejection of recognisable character traits: 'with Barbara you feel that, had the cards of your life fallen a little differently, you could *be* her' (Faulks, p.288). Through its frustration of simplistic readings and representation of social responses to events and people, the novel challenges the reader to consider the factors that underpin their own responses.

Remainder

Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* opens with its unnamed narrator describing what little he can remember of a trauma sustained in an accident for which he is heavily compensated. In fact, his memory of this event consists only of a feeling of being

‘buffeted by wind’³³. Although both the reader and the narrator have no insight into how the narrator felt before the accident, he describes being left with a feeling of disconnection with reality. To combat this, he attempts to re-enact a series of events, facilitated by an £8.5m legal compensation which is invested and continues to appreciate in value. He employs a vast team of people who do and say exactly what he wants them to, dictated in minute detail. In the final re-enactment of a bank-heist, one of his staff trips and is killed when a gun is accidentally fired. In the aftermath of this the narrator deliberately shoots another of the men before boarding a plane, which, at the novel’s end, is flying in a perpetual figure of eight. At the same time as this the plane with all of his staff on board is scheduled to take off and subsequently explode. The novel’s narrative chaos echoes the protagonist’s descent into madness.

Many critical commentators on McCarthy’s work cite Zadie Smith’s essay ‘Two Directions for the Novel’ – a seminal response that purports to identify a ‘future’ for the novel. Smith suggests that *Remainder* is a refusal of the lyrical realism that has long dominated the novel form in favour of a self-conscious experimentalism that poses a challenge to the privileging of concepts of truth and authenticity.³⁴ This thesis endeavours to explore some of *Remainder*’s postmodern, self-conscious experiments. The novel challenges claims to truth through McCarthy’s employment of a number of metafictional techniques. He explicitly draws attention to the experimental aspects of his fiction, threatening to destroy the semblance of reality that he has created, while still managing to keep the fiction intact. By identifying the metafictional elements of the novel and drawing parallels with the metafictional tropes present in the other three novels examined, the final chapter aims to underline the ways in which the four

³³ McCarthy, Tom. *Remainder* (Alma Books: Surrey, 2007) p.8

³⁴ Smith, Zadie. *Changing my mind: Occasional essays*. (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2009). p.71

novelists utilise the novel form to tread the aforementioned boundary between entertainment and incredulity. In doing so they stop just short of alienating their readers and instead draw attention to the powerful social commentaries that underpin the works.

The chapter also considers the way in which *Remainder* interrogates the notion of a sympathetic or empathetic response to the other by destabilising the notion of victims and perpetrators. The novel questions what constitutes a normal or average reader or character and goes on to challenge and thwart the reader's expectations of the novel, resulting in a discomfiting reading experience that heightens a reader's awareness of their own affective responses. Zadie Smith refers to *Remainder* (or at least, to its opening fifty pages) as 'a kind of anti-literature hoax' (Smith, p84). The chapter explores the ways in which it does the opposite to what we expect from the experience of reading a novel and how this impacts on the reader's response to the depiction of contemporary reality. When Smith refers to *Remainder* as paving a new direction for the novel, we can consider that it also raises the possibility of a new direction for engaging with and interrogating contemporary madness discourse.

Whereas this thesis approaches the examination of the other three novels from the perspective of the group rejecting the deviant person through the process of labelling them mad, *Remainder* engages with the representation of madness as the individual's total rejection of sociality. As noted earlier, a trend of fiction of the 1990's was the depiction of the process of an individual going mad. *Remainder* subverts the position of the reader, and rather than allowing a passive observation of this descent into madness, the novel questions the point at which the reader recognises the

psychopathology and challenges them to consider their response to this. The novel tests the point at which the reader rejects the individual, shifting from a position of empathy and identification. This draws attention to the point at which an individual can be labelled mad, and – as Darian Leader questions – considers what we can reflect about their mental state prior to this point.

The narrative refuses the other in various ways. We are only permitted access to the narrator's perspective, which entirely obscures reactions of the other, bringing into focus the notion of the mad individual whose view of the world disregards connection with others. Normal readerly reactions are also thwarted – humour stops short of being funny, sexual trysts are unfulfilled – but this serves to heighten our enthrallment with the character and simultaneously draws attention to the fascinating qualities of the mad person. Madness is depicted as a gradually occurring process arising as an active rejection of the social or group norms. It deals with multiple perceptions of reality that pose perpetual threats to the status quo.

The chapter looks at the heteronormativity implied in the rejection of sexual connections and the pathology implied in the rejection of social ones. The novel draws attention to ingrained codes of gender and sexuality that underpin contemporary reality and looks at masculine and feminine spaces and the way traditional gender roles are enacted and subverted today.

Anders Breivik and Joanna Dennehy

Prior to examining the four novels, the thesis will consider a case study of a high profile media event that poignantly highlights the crucial nature of the discussions that these

novels inspire. The Anders Breivik case epitomises contemporary concern with the “mad” individual and the ways in which society responds to the involvement of psychiatry and the law in high profile cases of extreme and violent crime. The chapter also considers the ways in which the UK media both communicates these issues and responds to public opinion. The case strongly resonates with a number of key themes of the novels that are elucidated on throughout the thesis. Commencing the thesis with an examination of these key themes as framed by the Breivik case allows us to understand exactly why the dialogue about the contemporary promoted by these novels is so crucial.

Breivik killed 77 people and wounded many others in a series of bomb attacks and shootings in Norway in 2011. The definition of Anders Breivik’s sanity was the main focal point of the media discussion, as well as the responses of the legal and psychiatric systems, in the aftermath of his violent crimes. The initial chapter of this thesis examines some of the communicative strategies that underpin these systemic responses, considering the ways in which deductions of madness or sanity are made, and the connotations that accompany the way these conclusions are conveyed to the general public. The chapter considers the notion of madness as cemented by a person’s singularity in comparison to others, and the subsequent impact of this singularity on notions of accountability for criminal actions. The case study raises questions about how society is able to comment on and respond to the way the deviant individual is treated and explores the notion that the public perception can in fact *shape* a psychopathological and legally influential diagnosis. This ties in to widespread cultural scepticism about the very nature of diagnosing madness in response to criminality.

Madness is, in this instance, defined as a delusion that is not shared. The Breivik case brings to light the binary that has been created that aligns madness with irrationality and

incomprehensibility, and conversely the sane with the normative and rational ideals. The chapter also looks at the way the UK media responds to gender prejudices in Breivik's manifesto, and also feeds into narratives about the role of the mother in the creation of psychopaths.

The enormity of the role played by the tabloid media is of central concern to the chapter, and one observation is the way in which the media alternates from a dramatic exclamation to a narrative solution, as a means of perpetuating frenzy and then offering a narrative restoration of calm. This artistic formula can be recognised across all of the fictions, and offers a fascinating insight into the ways in which the novels mimic mass communication as a means of probing contemporary reality. Finally, in the concluding pages of the thesis we revisit the tabloid media discourse in a final case study of a contemporary media figure. Joanna Dennehy was sentenced to a whole-life term in prison for three counts of murder and two counts of attempted murder in 2014. Dennehy's treatment in the media with regard to her crime, her madness and most significantly her gender augments a number of the questions raised by the novels.

A primary argument of this thesis is that the four novels being examined do more than merely entertain – they prompt the reader to ask fundamental questions about contemporary humanity. The authors' engagement with pertinent social debates, misconceptions and communicative inconsistencies allows for an essential reflection on a number of vital issues.

Chapter One: Case Study - Anders Breivik

Breivik is a truly modern monster. His unspeakably monstrous acts have given tangible form to that which currently challenges the established order of identities, systems, borders and rules – for him personally and for a whole range of different individuals and social and cultural groups – Alexa Wright, Monstrosity.³⁵

On 22nd July 2011 Anders Behring Breivik detonated a homemade fertiliser-based car bomb outside the Norwegian government buildings in the centre of Oslo. The car bomb killed eight people and wounded many others. Breivik then travelled approximately 38km to the island of Utøya, where, dressed in a police uniform and posing as an officer to gain access, he shot dead a further 69 people. Many of the individuals killed at Utøya were teenagers attending the annual conference of the governing Labour party's youth organisation. Breivik later claimed that his motives for the events were his far-right political beliefs, including the belief that the rise of multiculturalism has had an adverse effect on white, Christian cultural identity, leading to 'a Marxist Islamic takeover of Europe.'³⁶ Prior to the events of July 22nd, Breivik had sent a 1,500 page manifesto via email to over 1,000 email addresses. The manifesto, entitled *2083 – a European Declaration of Independence*, outlined Breivik's ideological beliefs and detailed his preparations for the attacks.

After around 50 minutes of shooting on Utøya island, Breivik made a call to the police saying he wanted to give himself up, but when the telephone connection was broken Breivik continued shooting.³⁷ Breivik was arrested when armed police arrived on the

³⁵ Wright, Alexa. *Monstrosity: The Human Monster in Visual Culture*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013) p161

³⁶ 'Profile: Anders Behring Breivik', 12 April 2012, BBC News
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14259989>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

³⁷ Layton, J., 'Anders Behring Breivik's calls to police are made public', 25 Nov 2011, The Guardian
<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/25/anders-behring-breivik-calls-surrender>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

island around 20 minutes later - a consequence to which he offered no resistance - and was held in police custody, with the first four weeks spent in solitary confinement. Despite referring to his actions as a suicide mission and to his belief that he would eventually be killed by police, Breivik has been able to speak at length about his motivations and political beliefs as well as providing extensive details about the preparation for and execution of the bombing and shootings from his own perspective.³⁸ The detailed narrative that Breivik has created, both before and after his horrific and violent acts, offers a complex insight into his rationale. The media's representation of both the man and the narrative provides a further layer through which society's reaction to the events can be scrutinised. The case reveals the complexities of the links that have been established between madness and criminal behaviour, and epitomises contemporary attitudes and scepticisms towards what it means to be labelled mad in response to an extreme criminal act.

Breivik's trial began on 16th April 2012 and lasted until 22nd June 2012 with sentencing in August of the same year. As well as investigating both the bombing and the shootings in detail, the trial's primary concern was Breivik's psychological profile. Before he was sentenced to 21 years imprisonment on 24th August 2012, the court first had to declare Breivik legally sane, and therefore accountable for his actions. This attracted immense worldwide media and public attention. A dialogue was established between the public and the legal and psychiatric systems – facilitated by the media, the involvement of which will be examined later in the chapter – on the notion of 'madness' as a defining response to extreme violent crimes. During his trial Breivik

³⁸ Andersen, A, 'Anders Behring Breivik phoned police to surrender but carried on when they failed to return call', 23 Apr 2012, The Telegraph
<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/9221909/Anders-Behring-Breivik-phoned-police-to-surrender-but-carried-on-when-they-failed-to-return-call.html>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

apologised to a single family – that of a pub landlord who was killed in the Oslo explosion. Breivik refused to apologise for killing the remainder of his victims, referring to them as legitimate targets on the grounds of their political beliefs.³⁹

A number of key themes emerge from an examination of the mediated narrative of the Breivik case. The trial highlighted several popular misconceptions, including the notion that a person who commits a crime of such an extreme nature must therefore be insane, as well as the concept of insanity as a defensive strategy used by a perpetrator to attain judicial lenience or even total acquittal.⁴⁰ These themes are fundamental, both to a general discussion of the “mad criminal” in contemporary society, and to a discussion of the ways in which the four novels examined in the subsequent chapters of this thesis engage with and probe this discussion. The pejorative connotations of madness and the scepticism of both the “mad” individual and the group reveals the profound instability of the terms used to define the enigmatic deviant figure. Perceptions of psychiatry and the law are represented in similarly indeterminate ways with the subjectivity associated with the definition and management of the deviant figure revealing a systemic and socio-cultural uncertainty. In narrating these complicated aspects, the media contributes to an epistemological hysteria, creating a frenzied demand for explanation and discourse on justice. The media then offers to pacify this through the denouncing of the individual in terms of their difference and distance from the “norm” and by offering explanations which, as we will see, contextualise the transgressive individual in terms of their “madness”. Ultimately, once the individual has been labelled, they can be socially managed through penal or clinical channels. The normalised, law-abiding public is ostensibly permitted a voice, creating a sense of control and social calm

³⁹ ‘Breivik compares grief of victims’ families to his pain at being shunned’, 23 Apr 2012, *The Guardian* < <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/23/breivik-compares-grief-victims-families> > [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

⁴⁰ Wessely, Simon, ‘Anders Breivik, the public, and psychiatry,’ *The Lancet*, 379: 9826 (2012), p.1564

through the firm rejection of the “mad” other by the establishing of a “centre” against which abnormalities can be defined and managed.

How Breivik Was Deemed Mad

The link between Breivik’s “madness” and his criminal actions was established as a result of adherence to Norwegian jurisprudence but is characteristic of many Western legal systems that consider the mental state of the offender in establishing criminal responsibility. In Norwegian law the court is obliged to produce a psychiatric evaluation that establishes the legal accountability of the offender prior to judgement – if the individual is found to be not legally accountable then they are sentenced to compulsory psychiatric treatment as opposed to prison.⁴¹ While treatment takes place in a secure setting and therefore requires that the individual be detained - having the same physical consequence as incarceration in prison - the symbolic suggestion is that there are certain criminal behaviours that can be deemed pathological and therefore can be clinically treated. There is a fundamental paradox between the notion that certain criminal acts are so extreme that they must denote madness, and the notion that madness precludes an individual from being subject to full legal consequences. The widespread acceptance in Western legal systems that a person can be deemed to be less criminally accountable or responsible for their actions if they can be proven to have some level of mental disorder is therefore extremely problematical. While it serves to account for and offer some level of protection to mentally disordered individuals, it crucially destabilises notions of criminality, madness and sanity. This is questioned in chapters Two and Three through an examination of Faulks’ and Shriver’s representations of the convergence of the legal and psychiatric systems.

⁴¹ Grondhal in Melle, Ingrid. ‘The Breivik case and what psychiatrists can learn from it.’ *World Psychiatry* 12.1 (2013), (p17)

Breivik was subject to a psychiatric evaluation, which yielded a series of complex and interesting results and reactions. Torgeir Husby and Synne Sørheim, the psychiatrists carrying out the evaluation, spent over 36 hours interviewing Breivik, who described to them his role in the Knights Templar group - a network whose existence has not been proven - and his belief that 'it is his mission to decide who should live and die.'⁴²

Norwegian law establishes a direct correlation between the presence of psychosis and a person's reduced criminal responsibility – psychosis at the time the crime was committed precludes the individual from being deemed responsible for their criminal actions.⁴³ This initial psychiatric evaluation diagnosed Breivik with paranoid schizophrenia on the grounds that he was experiencing grandiose delusions - specifically those relating to his beliefs about his political mission and involvement with the Knights Templar group - both at the time of the crime and at the time of the evaluation. The recommendation was that he should not be held legally accountable for his actions and therefore he should be mandated to indefinite residential psychiatric care.

The initial reaction to the finding that Breivik was criminally insane - both at the time that he was interviewed and, crucially, at the time the crime was carried out - was mixed. A number of commentators felt that, due to the mandatory residential nature of the treatment imposed by a finding of criminal insanity, the outcomes of prison and psychiatric care were, in effect, equivalent. The result of both is the physical removal of Breivik from society. One member of the public epitomised this viewpoint in the following remark she made to a journalist:

⁴² Maseide, Per Helge, 'The battle about Breivik's mind', *The Lancet*, 379: 9835, (2012), (p.2413)

⁴³ Bortolotti, Lisa, Broome, Matthew R. & Mameli, Matteo. 'Delusions and Responsibility for Action: Insights from the Breivik Case.' *Neuroethics* 7:3 (2013), (p.378)

“It doesn’t matter whether he is locked up in a psychiatric institution or in a prison, as long as he is locked up,” she said. “But for him, who thought he was a great thinker, he must be furious to have been declared insane.”⁴⁴

Breivik was described as feeling ‘insulted’ by the ruling.⁴⁵ Interestingly, it was the prosecution that put forward the case that Breivik’s psychological profile indicated that he was psychotic. Ordinarily the notion of criminal insanity is linked to defensive pleas, but the Norwegian court’s obligation to evaluate the criminal accountability of the accused (Melle, p.17) necessarily brought the question of madness into consideration. In contrast with the stereotypical notion of the defendant’s pleas of insanity as alibi, Breivik countered strongly any intimation that he was mentally ill on the grounds that it would diminish his political statement. In a letter he sent to the Norwegian media while awaiting trial, Breivik said:

I must admit this is the worst thing that could have happened to me as it is the ultimate humiliation. To send a political activist to a mental hospital is more sadistic and evil than to kill him! It is a fate worse than death.⁴⁶

Breivik’s reference to defining a political activist in terms of madness as a sadistic and evil act draws attention to the symbolic resonance of the term. As will be examined in further detail below, when discussing his motivations and justifying his acts, Breivik reproduces the terminology - ‘sadistic and evil’ - used by the media when describing the character of the media-profiled transgressive individual. In contrast with the aforementioned public opinion that any type of incarceration of the dangerous

⁴⁴ Deshayes, PH. ‘Norway split on Breivik’s likely fate in mental ward, as mass-killer himself ‘insulted’ by ruling’, 30 Nov 2011, National Post
<<http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/11/30/norway-split-on-breiviks-likely-fate-in-mental-ward-as-mass-killer-himself-insulted-by-ruling/>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Fouche, G. ‘Norway killer - ‘insane’ diagnosis “worse than death”’, 4 Apr 2012, Reuters
<<http://uk.reuters.com/article/2012/04/04/uk-norway-breivik-idUKBRE8330GN20120404>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

individual is of utmost importance, Breivik's perception of himself as a political activist was at first glance inconsequential. His statement served, if anything, to augment the impression of him as a madman with grandiose delusions declaring the whimsical importance of his own role and his own ideological agenda. However, the prevailing public opinion following the initial psychiatric report, in fact echoed Breivik's disdain for the psychiatric evaluation, which in turn, upon reflection, recasts its significance. As we will see, neither Breivik nor the public accepted Breivik being labelled as "mad". The ensuing debate attracted global media attention as a result of its implications about madness in a criminal context.

Public Outrage

In the aftermath of the disclosure of the psychiatric evaluation, public uncertainty and disbelief⁴⁷ gave way to outrage. The public were outraged at the notion that Breivik's moral culpability could be diminished by a psychiatric diagnosis, confirming the equation of the psychiatric ruling with an impression of Breivik as being exonerated or in some way justified. For the Norwegian public, the diagnosing of Breivik as a paranoid schizophrenic was unacceptable. Wessely suggests that the Breivik case reveals misconceptions about psychiatric ruling both on the part of the general public, who view an insanity ruling as offenders 'getting off' their crimes, and on the part of offenders, who generally express a preference for prison over a psychiatric setting. In relation to Breivik, Wessely states, 'The widespread anger when it seemed that Breivik was going to be sent to hospital rather than prison reminds us that liberal attitudes to mental illness are still often only skin deep' (Wessely, p.1564). The Breivik case reveals

⁴⁷ Anda, LG. 'Norwegian disbelief at Breivik 'insanity', ' 29 Nov 2011, BBC News <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-15954370>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

much more than the fragility of liberal attitudes. It reveals the fundamental fragility of the entire contemporary configuration of madness in a criminal setting. Subsequent chapters will show how contemporary novels engage with this debate. In this instance Breivik's thinking aligns perfectly with that of the majority of the public – to diagnose Breivik as mentally disordered is to lessen the impact of his actions, either on a political or a moral platform.

The implications of the influence of public opinion (and the power held by the media who shape this, which will be examined further below) on legal proceedings suggests that it is equal to, and in some cases more powerful than some expert psychiatric opinions:

On many occasions due deference is given by lawyers and jurymen to medical opinion, thus conferring apparent power to psychiatrists. This is an illusion because the power is on loan and can be withdrawn when the politics of a case, usually a high profile case, demand it. The mental abnormality excuse used to mitigate many crimes of homicide is not available for cases deemed inexcusable by the newspapers, politicians and public opinion. If by some skilful advocacy an 'inexcusable' crime is excused, then a public outcry occurs after the trial (Gunn in Bortolotti, p.378).

Public opinion in the Breivik case certainly carried more weight than the clinical findings of Husby and Sørheim. A re-evaluation of Breivik's mental state was demanded by the courts in response to the widespread reaction to the initial report.⁴⁸ The results of the re-evaluation entirely disagreed with the suggestions of the first that Breivik was psychotic at both the time of the crime and during this second evaluation, and therefore concluded that he should be held legally accountable for his crimes.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ 'Court orders new psychiatric review of Breivik' 13 Jan 2012, Fox news
<<http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/01/13/court-orders-new-psychiatric-review-breivik/>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

⁴⁹ The effect of the debate on the actual results of the re-evaluation would necessarily imply an unprofessional bias on the part of the second team of court-appointed psychiatrists and does not seem to

The second set of court-appointed psychiatrists suggested instead that Breivik's symptoms of 'pathological self-aggrandizement' (Melle, p.18) and social withdrawal were indicative of a 'severe narcissistic personality disorder combined with pseudological fantastica (pathological lying)' (Melle, p.19). Without diminishing the notion that Breivik was fundamentally "abnormal", the second set of psychiatrists declared him "not mad".

Plausibly, Breivik's refusal of his insanity should not have had an impact on his ultimate diagnosis. As I will examine further in the following chapter, in some psychiatric diagnoses an inability to recognise the mental disorder is in fact a diagnostic marker, and therefore Breivik's rejection of his own "madness" is not only immaterial, it could in fact be used to strengthen the diagnosis. Similarly, it is logical to assume that the public's preference that Breivik be deemed sane and therefore legally accountable should have no bearing on his ultimate correspondence to the current diagnostic criteria. However, while Breivik's rejection of his madness label is inconsequential, society's rejection of it bears heavily on the outcome. Certainly, it was the public and media-led calls for a re-evaluation - as opposed to Breivik's protestations - that eventually led to him being examined again six months after he was initially diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic. If the public outcry refused to accept a diagnosis of a physical illness, it is inconceivable that the opinion, however vehemently held, would successfully challenge and alter the diagnosis. The ability of public opinion to not only demand a re-evaluation, but to seemingly impact the clinical diagnostic outcome entirely destabilises the operation of psychiatry in a legal realm. The suggestion is that diagnoses can be manipulated in a legal context, not by offender, but by the legal system itself, to serve a specific social function.

have come under scrutiny at all. It is an area that would require extensive further research for which there is no room here.

Responding to the case in a blog post for the *British Medical Journal*, Julian Sheather reflects on the dual role performed by psychiatry here:

In essence, an insanity defence argues that the individual does not have the necessary mental conditions for criminal culpability. It puts him outside the community of moral agents, the community of those deemed responsible for their actions. In Breivik's case, it looks as if public opinion first called upon psychiatry to find him insane and defend the community from trying to make sense of the incomprehensible. As incredulity died away, psychiatry was then called upon to render him sane and return him to the moral community in which he can be tried for his crimes.⁵⁰

The Breivik case reveals then, that while the role of psychiatry in a criminal setting is ostensibly to comment on the impact the offender's mental state has on their ability to be deemed responsible for their criminal actions, there is in fact a far more complex mechanism at work. The psychiatric diagnosis, in offering a carefully packaged label for "what this individual is", offers a narrative. Through the interpretation of that narrative society is able to recognise and comprehend the deviant actions. Once an element of control over the individual has been (re)established, society is then able to accept or reject the narrative and what it ultimately signifies. The subsequent chapters of this thesis explore the ways in which the novels examined use their own narratives to draw attention to the contemporary quest for answers about the human *other*, the need to construct a comprehensible sequence of events and the fictions that structure the 'reality' represented in these accounts.

Solitary Madness

While the first assessment of Breivik's descriptions concluded that he was delusional, the second defined him as a pathological liar. Definition, it seems, is central. The

⁵⁰ Sheather, J. 'Anders Breivik and the social uses of psychiatry' 16 July 2012, BMJ Group blogs < <http://blogs.bmj.com/bmj/2012/07/16/julian-sheather-anders-breivik-and-the-social-uses-of-psychiatry/> > [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

Oxford English Dictionary definition of delusion is ‘an idiosyncratic belief or impression that is not in accordance with a *generally accepted reality*’ (emphasis mine)⁵¹. Whether Breivik’s central thought processes resulted from psychosis or from a willing and deliberate lie, both diagnoses depend heavily on the beliefs and accepted models of reality and truth held by the rest of society, to which Breivik is starkly contrasted. The demarcating of Breivik as other was, at first glance enough. Some of the initial reactions to the psychiatric finding adopted the attitude that it didn’t matter how Breivik was evaluated, as long as he was not allowed to go free.⁵² This reaction defines a person by their criminal act, and, despite psychosis negating an individual’s criminal liabilities, creates an equation of madness and criminality through the equivalence of consequences. While the urgency of the question of whether the individual is “mad or bad” dominates the media in the aftermath of the event, once the individual is incarcerated, the setting in which this occurs is seemingly inconsequential to the general public as justice will have been served through the initial social expression of disapproval. The rehabilitation of offenders in either a penal or psychiatric setting is established as the responsibility of the experts that oversee their management.

The Breivik case has fundamentally challenged this, and reflects that contemporary attitudes towards madness no longer view the outcome of this as inconsequential, but instead feel that the symbolic significance of what defining Breivik as psychotic would represent is vitally important. The vehement social comment reveals the refusal of “madness” as an explanation for unwanted behaviour that is difficult to comprehend or contextualise. One reason for this refusal is that the classification of deviant

⁵¹ Concise Oxford English Dictionary 11th edition (revised) (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁵² ‘Norway massacre: Breivik declared insane,’ 29 Nov 2011, BBC News
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-15936276>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

individuals as “mad” has led to the stigmatization of the mentally ill. An article released by the Canadian Mental Health Association attributes this to the media representation of cases such as Breivik’s:

[M]edia depictions of persons with a mental illness attacking a stranger do much to shape public opinion. The saliency of such high-profile crimes, despite their infrequency, makes it appear as though violent crimes committed by individuals with a psychiatric diagnosis are common and that the general public has reason to fear people with mental illness.⁵³

The article contextualises this in terms of the marginalising of the mentally ill, stating that ‘people who suffer from mental illness are often pushed to the fringes of, or are directly excluded from, society’ (Taylor & Baun, p.31). The fascination of the Breivik case lies in what it reveals about the role society plays in this process of marginalisation and exclusion of the deviant or abnormal other from society. The following chapter of this thesis examines the way in which normality is defined in contrast to abnormality, and Chapter Four locates this process of social exclusion in a theory of scapegoating.

Breivik’s remoteness from the rest of society is echoed through the representation of him as a ‘lone wolf’ killer. Breivik’s delusions were linked to his descriptions of his role in the Knights Templar organisation. Defined by his extremist views and “terrorist” actions, Breivik, at first glance, fits the profile of the contemporary phenomenon of fundamentalist carrying out heinous crimes in the name of a religious or ideological belief held by a minority faction. However, investigation into the Knights Templar group to which he claims to belong has produced no evidence to support its existence and individual members of far-right groups such as the English Defence League have been quick to deny any links with Breivik.⁵⁴ Although the legal

⁵³ Taylor, Alexander and Kismet Baun. ‘Stigma Matters: The Media’s Impact on Public Perceptions of Mental Illness.’ *Ottawa Life*, February 2009, p.31

⁵⁴ Gardham, D, ‘Anders Behring Breivik trial: the ‘real’ Lionheart,’ 18 April 2012, The Telegraph

defence called witnesses such as Arne Tumyr, the head of an organisation called Stop the Islamisation of Norway, to show that others in Norway shared Breivik's far right political view of the world, Tumyr also refused to support or condone Breivik's actions.⁵⁵

Bortolotti *et al* have put forward a hypothesis that suggests that Breivik's failure to garner any ostensible support from extremist groups that may share some of his ideologies may in fact be one of the factors that serves to indicate the existence of mental disorder:

For claims about responsibility, the significance of the fact that some of Breivik's beliefs were not shared [by the person's community or sub-community] may derive from the following consideration. If poor reality testing (or some other relevant cognitive deficit associated with delusion formation) is affecting the beliefs he is prepared to endorse to the extent that such beliefs are implausible even to members of groups that are inclined to share his political and ideological views, then maybe such failure of reality testing (or other relevant cognitive deficit) is also implicated in some of his decision making processes that led him to his criminal acts (Bortolotti, p.380).

As will be explored further in the following chapter, the DSM relies on the conventions of the person's community or sub-community to identify abnormality in terms of its contrast with socio-cultural normality. Seemingly, membership of a group, however small, is what cements a person's beliefs in reality. Breivik is solitary and a member of no tangible group – he is an activist on behalf of his own politics. In using this to frame him in the context of madness, we need to consider political minorities. The case raises questions of how small a political or ideological minority can be without being deemed “delusional”. At what point does a minority view equal madness? Breivik's reality

< <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/9212090/Anders-Behring-Breivik-trial-the-real-Lionheart.html> > [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

⁵⁵ ‘Norwegian far right defend Breivik's views on Islam,’ 5 Jun 2012, BBC News <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-18332442>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

testing is heavily influenced by the correspondence of those beliefs with the beliefs of others. The hypothesis put forward by Bortolotti et al demonstrates the entirely subjective set of criteria that is being utilised in determining a person's reality, a person's sanity, and a person's criminal responsibility.

In her exploration of the lessons that can be learnt from the Breivik case, Ingrid Melle provides an overview of Breivik's description of his own and of the seemingly fictitious group's ideologies and demonstrates how the psychiatrists used this to arrive at their diagnosis. She says:

The psychiatrists saw these as grandiose delusions with bizarre and paranoid qualities that went far beyond conspiracy notions about an Islamist take-over of Europe. Thus, they did not consider him psychotic by mistaking his extremist, racist, right-wing views as delusional, but because they thought he had grandiose delusions regarding *his own role* in the extremist universe (Melle, p.18).

Breivik's diagnosis was based on his individual, particular personal beliefs. Statements that could be united with racism or right-wing principles were not considered grandiose delusions because of their attachment to the tenets held by others, regardless of their minority view – this would represent a shared reality. Breivik's grandiose delusions – which were considered markers that indicated insanity – were the beliefs he held that were entirely unique to him and therefore could not be ascribed to the social, even on a marginal scale. Breivik's madness was defined by his isolation – because no support could be found for his beliefs, he was able to be defined as mentally abnormal. Both Breivik and the general public refused this notion of Breivik as mad for reasons of context. For Breivik, the diagnosis undermined his political statement making them seem as though they are the ramblings of a madman. For the general public, it was nonsensical that Breivik's isolated belief system allowed him to be removed from

adherence to the legal codes that governed the society within which he was operating, which amounts to a wholesale rejection of the presence of psychiatric evaluation in the legal system. The role of the psychiatrist in a legal setting is explored further in Chapter Three.

In a debate published by the *British Medical Journal*, Tom Fahy, Professor of Forensic Mental Health at Kings College London suggests that to psychopathologise extremists like Breivik exonerates them from moral culpability, and exempts society from having to strive to understand and address the origins of their beliefs.⁵⁶ In his opposing piece, however, Max Taylor, Professor of International Relations at the University of St Andrews, aligns madness with extremism, suggesting that a psychiatric framework can be applied to Breivik's type of 'excessive fanaticism,' with the supplementary benefit of forensic psychiatric settings 'not feeding into his delusional ideational state or that of those who might seek to emulate him.'⁵⁷

Taylor's suggestion here forms a direct correlation between mental illness and the control of extreme ideological beliefs, feeding into the wider debate regarding the aforementioned stigma that mentally ill, law-abiding individuals are forced to endure. Taylor's allusion to Breivik as being *excluded* from terrorist groups because of the irrational nature of his motivations draws parallels between this exclusion and psychosis.

The fanaticism shown by Breivik is of such a degree that no extremist groups endorse his position; and this is exactly what happens in psychosis. Delusional people tend not to be able to gather supporters for their ideas because their reasoning is so off kilter that others cannot follow it. In the

⁵⁶ Fahy, Tom. "Do cases like that of Anders Breivik show that fanaticism is a form of madness? No." *BMJ* 345 (2012).

⁵⁷ Taylor, Max. "Do cases like that of Anders Breivik show that fanaticism is a form of madness? Yes." *BMJ* 345 (2012).

same way, Breivik lacks a sufficient basis in reality to explain the consequences of his actions.⁵⁸

We are led to understand then, that Breivik is so singular that he fails to be included within the group dynamic of terrorist fundamentalists – his ideals are too extreme even for the extremists. Taylor’s connection with psychosis suggests that decoding Breivik’s psyche follows the same formula – namely the gathering of supporters to vouch for his sanity, as opposed to the identification of inherent psychological traits or markers that indicate that Breivik fits the diagnostic criteria. As we have seen, the same set of information and criteria can be reframed to remove it from the context of one diagnosis, and place it within another. If we accept Taylor’s connection, the problem with the description of Breivik as sane or insane is seemingly not one of diagnosis, but one of acceptance – psychiatry is tasked with aligning Breivik with one of two groups, the insane, abnormal and irrational, or the sane, normative and rational. To deem Breivik sane brings him to account for his actions morally, but in doing so places his central thought processes within the reality that is shared by the rest of society.

The Media’s Role in the Breivik Case

For the public, much of the shock and disbelief that surrounded the initial psychiatric diagnosis was located in the disparity between the representation of Breivik, and the common conception of what constitutes “madman”. Minute details and eyewitness accounts of Breivik’s crimes had dominated the media, as well as widespread commentaries on and analysis of his manifesto. Because of the amount of information available about the events, questions about Breivik’s criminal status were perplexing to the Norwegian public, given the number of witnesses to the event and Breivik’s own

⁵⁸ Ibid.

defiant ownership of his actions. There could be no question of his guilt for the crime. So while “madness” could be accepted as a cultural term and employed in lay descriptions, the official psychiatric diagnosis seemingly threatened the fulfilment of justice for the events. Breivik could be dubbed “mad” but not identified as mentally ill.

The psychotic label and process of questioning Breivik’s soundness of mind conflicted greatly with the image of his highly functioning organisational capacity. Breivik had thus far been portrayed as the perpetrator of acts that had been carefully and calculatedly planned and meticulously detailed in the manifesto, although some saw the manifesto as primary evidence of his grandiose delusions (Anda, LG, para 26 of 32). It seemed to the public that the insanity ruling would signify Breivik ‘getting away’ with his actions. While this mood does reveal a number of misconceptions in the public consciousness about mental illness, criminal responsibility and legal consequences, it also serves as a signpost towards the media, whose complex involvement in the representation of Breivik highlights the ways in which these cultural stereotypes can be seen to be produced and reinforced.

In a legal and psychiatric context, a person can be mad or bad – but not both, as a result of legal clauses such as the diminished responsibility plea in British law, and the Norwegian definition of legal insanity under which Breivik was scrutinized, diagnosed and then subsequently un-diagnosed. The reduction of a person’s responsibility or accountability for their criminal actions implied by these clauses suggests that mental disorder can impact on a person’s moral comprehension. This will be examined further in Chapters Two and Three. The amalgamation of a person’s legal responsibility and their mental state, leading to this preclusion of a person being *both* mentally ill and criminally accountable, is continually being challenged in legal case law, in psychiatry and in anti-stigma campaign groups. The media, however, plays a pivotal role in

exploiting the fundamental tension between the two states, through a process of creating a dramatic crisis surrounding the definition and labelling of the deviant individual, and subsequently offering narrative pacification.

The allure of the Breivik case in the media lay not only in the extreme nature of the violent crimes carried out, but in the opportunity that it offered for the representation of an enigmatic figure. The media has ostensibly been employed in the effort to try to decode Breivik, to offer an explanation for his deviation from the norms of culture, society and humanity. The process of investigating the enigma is in itself alluring, and the resolution of the questions raised is what appears to be the aim for both media and audience. On a commercial level however, definitive resolution subsequently puts an end to the discussion about it, thus rendering the media's function complete. The media is invested in perpetuating the uncertainty, promoting an alarming image of a society at risk from a highly dangerous "other". In offering an outcry against the "mad and bad" individuals that threaten society, as well as against the systems that inadequately deal with them, the media is established as heroic spokesperson for the group.

Simon Cross locates the contemporary configuration of this phenomenon in the 1990s, when:

market-leading tabloids including *The Sun* and *Daily Mail* mobilized a motley assortment of scary 'Others' including asylum seekers, illegal immigrants and 'mad and bad' offenders against which they protected 'us' from 'them' (Stayner, 2007). Thus the 'mad and bad' folk devil reflects a culture of political populism in the UK newspaper market, *not* a culture of misinformed tabloid journalism cited by anti-stigma campaigners (eg *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 2013, Thornicroft, 2006).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Cross, Simon. 'Mad and bad media: Populism and pathology in the British tabloids.' *European Journal of Communication* 29:2 (2014), (p.206)

Cross goes on to suggest that through an analysis of the hypocrisy in the media representation of criminal responsibility and mental health care, a pathological or even insane ‘diagnosis’ could be given to the logic underpinning the tabloids. While this reveals media double-standards, it also points to the limitations and weaknesses of the diagnostic process.

The suggestion that - regardless of globally accepted diagnostic criteria - Breivik’s crime itself is indubitable evidence of the perpetrator’s insanity underpins headlines such as, ‘Declared sane despite killing 77 people [...]The Norwegian nutcase will now go to prison rather than a mental hospital for his car bombing and shooting spree,’⁶⁰ and allows the media to act as moral spokesperson on behalf of the public. Defining Breivik as mad allows the media to offer a reassuring narrative, offering calm to its self-perpetuated chaos.

It is the ‘otherness’ of the individual that serves the media’s dual function – both to shock, and then to reassure. Breivik, as the purveyor of such an extreme act, gains the attention of the public, who strive to understand the nature of such a shocking act.

From a tabloid media perspective, this engagement offers a clear selling point – alliterative tag lines such as ‘Bloodbath beast Anders Breivik was caged for the rest of his evil life’⁶¹ entice readers with the promise of details of gore and violence, rationalized through its promotion of an account of justice being served. This juxtaposition of horror and safety is achieved through the dehumanisation of Breivik – he is a beast, a monster, a caged animal. Both insanity and moral bankruptcy are

⁶⁰ Atkins, N, ‘Declared sane despite killing 77 people: Anders Breivik gets 21 years in jail for Norway massacre,’ 24 Aug 2012, The Mirror
<<http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/anders-breivik-sentenced-to-21-years-1277106>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

⁶¹ Syson, N, ‘Deluded, defiant, evil ... but not mad,’ April 2012, The Sun
<<http://www.thesun.co.uk/sol/homepage/news/4503637/Oslo-monster-Anders-Breivik-jailed-for-21-years-over-massacre.html>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

represented as at a remove from the norms of humanity, which serves to semi-fictionalise Breivik. In representing him in monstrous, animalistic, or sub-human terms, the refusal of his rationalisation of his acts can be justified.

In *Monstrosity: The Human Monster in Visual Culture*, Alexa Wright considers the terms being used to depict unwanted behaviour:

Like ‘monster’, ‘psychopath’ is a label that sets certain unacceptable human traits, primarily the lack of empathy and conscience, apart from the ‘norm’. In doing so it absolves society of any responsibility for the monstrous events that have occurred (Wright, p149).

In his deliberate use of this very terminology to describe his victims - or opponents - Breivik has established a stark and direct contrast between his ideologies and those he opposes. The discursive techniques used to describe the ‘psychopathic’ figure, have been turned upon the majority by Breivik, creating an uncomfortable parallel between the communicative strategies of the media and those utilised by the figure that is purported to be insane and abnormal. The absolution of society of responsibility for these ‘monstrous events’ is profoundly destabilised by Breivik’s employment of equilibrial terminology.

Wright goes on to respond to the media’s fixation on Breivik’s crazed characteristics, until his “sanity” was asserted by the second psychiatric evaluation. She refers to Breivik being described as rambling, fixated and delusional throughout his trial:

Comments such as these offer a means of categorically setting this criminal character apart from the ‘norm’, identifying him as someone who cannot share the common reality of ‘normal’ people and who is not responsible for his own ‘evil’, inhuman actions. [...] Since he has been officially deemed sane, the idea of Breivik as ‘a monster made by multiculturalism’, or ‘a distinctively right-wing kind of monster’ can act as another means of dismissing the kind of extremist ideology he upholds. If he is not ‘mad’, he must be a monster (Wright, p162).

The focus on aspects of abnormality, insanity or extremism in the depiction of him perpetuates the notion of Breivik as non-human, which in fact reinforces the stigmatization of the mentally ill. In blurring the boundaries between madness and monstrosity, the media can be said to be furthering the stereotypical image of the dangerous crazed mad person posing a threat to safety.

Breivik's case complicated media notions of madness and badness, predicated on exploiting both the animalistic violence of the crime and the manipulative and calculating nature of the perpetrator. Breivik's manifesto served this purpose entirely. Questions such as, 'Is Anders Breivik mad? If he is, does this mean he will 'get away' with his crimes? Could he fake insanity to escape prison altogether?'⁶² establish a moral crisis and, on the surface, undermine the representation of his insanity, by portraying it as a ruse.

Breivik's case frustrated the media's conventional portrayal of a conniving individual conspiring to "play the insanity card" for judicial leniency. It was thwarted through Breivik's assertion of his own sanity and emphasis on the political motivation behind his actions. This went on to garner worldwide media attention surrounding the Norwegian process of ascertaining the extent of Breivik's criminal sanity, underlining the magnitude of both the case and the media's approach to reporting it in terms of what they denote about contemporary discussions of the human subject. The four novels that are foregrounded in the subsequent chapters of this thesis reveal their discontent with the lack of cultural examination of this relationship between the group and the

⁶² Hanlon, M, 'The madness of Anders Breivik: To what extent can a deranged human being be held responsible for his actions?', 2 Aug 2011, The Daily Mail
<<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2020250/Norway-shootings-To-extent-Anders-Behring-Breivik-held-responsible-actions.html>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

individual, and promote further social exploration of these issues and questions that are epitomised by the Breivik case.

The discursive strategies employed by the tabloid representation of the transgressive individual rely on the heavy blurring of the carefully constructed legal/psychiatric borderline. The media establishes a narrative in which the individual is both mad *and* bad, creating a psycho-monster figure that incites terror in society, serving a dual purpose. The sensationalised reporting on the individual's acts serves to entertain through shock and the incitement of fear. Once the fear has been instilled, the media, through the narrative process of attributing meaning to this, and through an outcry wherever justice is seemingly not served, ensures that the threat of the individual to the group is neutralised. In rooting the crime in madness, the media offers a calming voice to the public, counteracting the frenzied fear initially created by the sensational reporting, and offering a rationalisation for what has happened. As lawyer Carl Bore puts it, “People ask themselves how this could happen, and look for scapegoats. [...] Maybe we can more easily move on as a society when we see that it was simply caused by a sick person” (Anda, para. 31 of 32). In this reduction, however, the sick person becomes the scapegoat, leading to the widely documented stigmatisation of law abiding individuals diagnosed with mental illnesses and psychoses, perpetuated by tabloid staples such as ‘sicko’ and ‘psycho’.

The moral crisis established through the representation of the perceived consequences of Breivik's acts is the systemic ‘loophole’ that seemingly allows individuals to contravene the rules that bind the rest of society. Through this moral crisis there is a clear divide that is established between the individual and the collective, positing the

deviant as external to the group through the definition of them as different and abnormal. Through joining together to voice their dissatisfaction with the adequacy of the system that deals with the 'other', the collective group is defined. The media's portrayal of the individual as both psychotic and unpredictable, and as cunning and exploitative, demarcates the offender as different, and serves to reinforce and justify their rejection from the group.

This neutralisation of the anxieties of the group through the expulsion of the transgressive individual resonates with Girard's scapegoat theory in which he posits that the mounting risk of mimetic violence in a community is pacified through the sacrifice of a scapegoat figure. Chapter Four explores the Girardian theory in greater detail, demonstrating how – as with the consequences of Breivik's acts – the guilty status of the individual is not of foremost concern. What is at stake is the process of attributing the problems within the society to the singular individual who is ritualistically expelled from the group. The discursive approach to deviant individuals such as Breivik reveals the narrative process and the fictional properties – the establishing of a 'monster' figure, for example – of ensuring the threat to the group is neutralised. Breivik's 'otherness' reminds society of the perpetrator's distance from human norms, and therefore rendering his political challenges to the status quo not valid, and averting the aforementioned widespread social panic. This is especially pertinent in light of Breivik's ideological claims.

A striking example is a comment piece written by Boris Johnson for the Telegraph's website, who offers consolation to his right-leaning readership that Breivik's politics are psychologically unsound. Ostensibly Johnson seems to promote a movement away

from the labelling and categorising of figures such as Breivik, stating that while Breivik is both ‘patently mad’ and the epitome of evil, these terms are insufficient in their descriptions.⁶³ However he then goes on to brandish Breivik an ‘evil nutcase’ and offers an individualised rationale. Johnson minimises Breivik’s politics through the employ of an expert witness – in the manner of the court appointing a psychiatrist to evaluate the defendant (the novelistic representation of the psychiatric expert witness is explored in Chapter Three). Johnson’s spokesperson is one of Breivik’s former friends, who suggests that Breivik’s attack on multiculturalism can be attributed to an occasion when ‘some girl he had a crush on jilted him in favour of a man of Pakistani origin.’⁶⁴

Johnson’s attempts at establishing a theoretical narrative explanation thinly veil his aims to establish a detachment from the ideologies espoused by Breivik that resonate with the right-wing politics of his readership. Johnson’s reduction of Breivik as a jilted lover also reveals the prevailing perceptions of masculinity and heteronormativity (further examined in Chapter Five) that dominates contemporary social discourse.

Sometimes there come along pathetic young men who have a sense of powerlessness and rejection, and take a terrible revenge on the world. Sometimes there are people who feel so weak that they need to kill in order to feel strong. They don’t need an ideology to behave as they do (Johnson, paragraph 10 of 11).

Addressing his readers as ‘my friends’, Johnson’s avuncular tone aims to soothe and calm his intended reader, advising them to pay Breivik no heed. This creates the impression of a group of which Breivik is strongly positioned as outside. We see again

⁶³ Johnson, B, ‘Anders Breivik: There is nothing to study in the mind of Norway’s mass killer’, 25 Jul 2011, The Telegraph

⁶⁴ Ibid

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/comment/columnists/borisjohnson/8658872/Anders-Breivik-There-is-nothing-to-study-in-the-mind-of-Norways-mass-killer.html>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015] (paragraph 10 of 11)

the mediated discourse that establishes a collective that is starkly contrasted with the individual. The intended reassuring pitch of the article suggests that Breivik's ideologies are built on the foundations of a flawed personality, reinforcing his singularity. Breivik's inability to integrate with the group has led to his transgression, to which the appropriate response, Johnson suggests, is for society to ignore him:

To try to advance any other explanation for their actions – to try to advance complicated “social” factors, or to examine the impact of multiculturalism in Scandinavia – is simply to play their self-important game. Anders Breivik [...] was essentially a narcissist and egomaniac who could not cope with being snubbed (Johnson, paragraph 11 of 11).

Breivik's otherness is invoked to incite concern, and then re-invoked to assure readers that he is an exception to the norm. Breivik's difference from the rest of society is employed as both a contributing and an identifying factor in establishing his madness, and again as the solution. Johnson's location of the phenomenon in Scandinavia, at a remove from Britain, doubly denies any need for political action or social reform in the UK in response to the Breivik case.

The Public's Interest

As well as the increase of multiculturalism in Europe, Breivik also justified his acts in his 1500 page manifesto by outlining a need to curb the development of women's liberty, which he outlined as contributing to many of the problems faced by contemporary society. Drawing further parallels with the media's “diagnosis” of him as pathologically abnormal, Breivik said, ‘I do not approve of the super-liberal,

matriarchal upbringing as it completely lacked discipline and has contributed to feminise me to a certain degree.’⁶⁵

In his paper for the *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, Stephen Walton examines the anti-feminist and misogynistic overtones in Breivik’s manifesto, which has been primarily summarised in the media with regard to its challenges to the multiculturalism to which Breivik so vehemently objects. As Walton identifies, Breivik objects equally to what he sees as the feminisation of the Western world, and in fact goes as far as to anchor the liberalism he despises in the women’s movement, suggesting that dwindling patriarchal values and an increased feminine acceptance of multiculturalism has weakened the Western world.⁶⁶ Breivik calls for the return of patriarchy, suggesting ways in which this can be implemented that include the limiting of women’s education to no higher than honours degree level with focus on woman’s role being primarily a reproductive one. Walton suggests that Breivik sees himself as a victim of feminism and believes that, ‘the “manifesto” clearly contains elements of an autodiagnosis. Breivik describes his childhood and personal history in terms that support his notion of feminism as an instrument of family breakdown and the collapse of civilisation’ (Walton, p8). To this extent, parallels between Breivik’s and Johnson’s rationalisations can be drawn, in that the autodiagnostic element of the manifesto locates the defining of Breivik within a failure to overcome a psychological developmental issue.

Despite Walton’s view that Breivik’s manifesto pays equal attention to feminism as it does to multiculturalism, the media’s focus has favoured the latter, revealing interesting

⁶⁵ Excerpt from Breivik’s manifesto in Billing, P and Kristian Stålne ‘Learning From the Unfathomable: An Analysis of Anders Behring Breivik’ *Integral Review* 7:2, (2011), (p156)

⁶⁶ Walton, Stephen J, ‘Anti-feminism and Misogyny in Breivik’s “Manifesto”’, *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research*, 20:1 (2012), (p10)

and crucial socio-cultural views on masculinity. Ellen Mortensen, member of the Centre for Women's and Gender Research at the University of Bergen, has written on some of the gender implications of Breivik's attacks, and cites incidents of abusive correspondence received by herself and her colleagues from supporters of Breivik's ideologies in response,⁶⁷ as a way of stressing 'the reality and urgency of the question of sexuate difference'.⁶⁸ The media's reluctance to prioritise the issue of this question, as well as some of the profoundly patriarchal values that can be identified as underpinning the narrative approach to Breivik's upbringing suggests that the gunman's discourse, which has been so vehemently repudiated, is not as distant from the mainstream socio-cultural consciousness as the mediatised descriptions of his acute abnormality imply.

In her article Mortensen outlines her argument that Breivik's vision of the future, put forward in his manifesto, is in fact based on a denial of difference – be it gender or cultural – and that the manifesto affirms the metaphysical scheme that 'posits Western man as the measure and norm for all humanity' (Mortensen p77). Mortensen utilises Luce Irigaray's critical reading of Western metaphysics and her framing of the question of sexual difference, asserting that Irigaray's work:

remains explicitly relevant as a point of immediate contrast to Breivik's visions, which encapsulates the sort of view that Irigaray is contesting. Within his scheme of thought, the masculine subject projects himself as the universal subject by denying his indebtedness to the feminine and the maternal, a subject that is self-constituted and who appropriates and objectifies the world around him (Mortensen p81).

⁶⁷ While Breivik was unable to secure any concrete evidence of membership of ideological groups in his psychiatric evaluations, a minority cult following of Breivik is indicated here as having arisen after his trial.

⁶⁸ Mortensen, Ellen. 'Sexuate difference in a time of terror.' *Thesis Eleven* 120.1 (2014), (p85)

It is Breivik's rejection of the maternal, as opposed to his rejection of ideals of feminism or gender equality that has piqued the interest of the media. Both of Anders Breivik's parents have been the subject of much public attention, but have received vastly varying treatment. An examination of this difference suggests that the media, on some level, concurs with Breivik's view that a dearth of masculinity and the rise of feminism leading to the breakdown of traditional family values can be cited as having catastrophic consequences. Despite references to Anders Breivik's bitterness at their estranged relationship,⁶⁹ his father, Jens Breivik, has primarily been represented in terms of the 'shock' and 'shame' that he felt on hearing the news. His bewilderment at the shootings is expressed through a description that reduces Breivik to a figure that is both remote from his father and is defined by his gender - 'I will forever be asking how a man could possibly develop such thoughts. And could I have done something?'⁷⁰ He is also represented in terms of his passive parenting role. He is a victim of both his son and of Breivik's mother:

"There was a formal report, in 1983, from the Norwegian childcare authorities," he says. "They recommended he should be moved. They said his relationship with his mother, her emotional incapacity to care for him, made it harmful for him to stay. But it was very difficult; Wenche would not admit to any problems. She wouldn't talk to me."⁷¹

The article goes on to offer a statement from Jens Breivik's current wife, who reasserts his masculinity by describing his difficulty in expressing emotions verbally.

⁶⁹ Allen, P, 'Mummy's boy who lurched to the Right was 'privileged' son of diplomat but despised his liberal family', 25 Jul 2011, Mail Online
<<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2018198/Norway-massacre-Killer-Anders-Behring-Breivik-privileged-son-diplomat.html>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

⁷⁰ Henley, J, 'Anders Behring Breivik trial: the father's story', 13 April 2012, The Guardian
<<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/13/anders-behring-breivik-norway>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

⁷¹ Ibid

The notion that the absence of the father can lead to abandonment issues implies the necessity of the masculine in any form, and in this case the feminine is configured as a barrier to this. The feminine on the other hand, must not only be present, but also must adhere to a certain set of socially prescribed criteria. One academic investigation striving to find ‘some answers to what made him a mass murderer’ suggests that the alleged damage caused to Breivik by his father’s abandonment echoes that which – as Breivik himself believes – has been caused by the diminishing effects of feminism on the assertion of the masculine:

Breivik not only felt abandoned by his father, but also by his whole country, a country that would not affirm or encourage his male identity. People may have different opinions on the necessity of a specific male value sphere to foster a healthy version of masculinity, but would anyone reading this wish to deny boys a sense of ownership of, and pride in, the biological sex they were born with? We imagine this is what happened to Breivik (Billing and Stalne, p.156).

In contrast, Wenche Behring Breivik’s representation has been primarily that of otherness, by the media and by her ex-husband: “‘She was an...unusual person. I think what she wanted to be was a single mother.’”⁷² This refusal of the masculine is defined as abnormal and contributes to the pathological explanations of Wenche. She is portrayed as distant and aloof, distinct from any traditional notions of “normal” femininity and in some extremes as sexually predatory towards her son. While Jens Breivik’s account has been the subject of newspaper and online articles, the maternal experience has garnered far more attention. Wenche is the subject of one full length book – *Moren* (The Mother) by journalist Marit Christensen (2013), and is heavily

⁷² Henley, J, ‘Anders Behring Breivik trial: the father's story’, 13 April 2012, The Guardian <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/apr/13/anders-behring-breivik-norway>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

profiled in another journalist penned publication entitled *A Norwegian Tragedy: Anders Behring Breivik and the Massacre on Utøya* (2013).

In *Moren* Christensen explores the complex relationship between mother and son, based on interviews held with Wenche, during which Wenche confessed to hating her son.

Christensen also provides a short public statement that Wenche penned, outlining her feelings of responsibility for the events in an attempt to re-align herself with the Norwegian public:

Dear fellow citizens, he who caused the tragedy also struck me. If I go out, someone will shoot me! I am the saddest mother in the world today.

(I) have been terribly sad and cried a lot. In addition to the grief of losing a son the sense of guilt weighs heavily on me. It would be easier to bear if he was dead ... his punishment is also my punishment.⁷³

Despite Wenche's choice not to release this statement before her death in 2013, Christensen reproduces it in her book alongside the information gleaned from the 72 hours of interviews between the two women. Before she died Wenche decided that she no longer wanted the book to be published, however this wish was disregarded by Christensen's publishers who argued that publication of the insight it offered into the Breivik case was in the 'public interest'.⁷⁴

Aage Borchgrevink, author of *A Norwegian Tragedy* also believes that Wenche Behring Breivik's influence on the events of 22nd July 2011 warrants public attention.

Borchgrevink approaches his investigation not only by establishing a causal link between Breivik's mother and his actions, alleging that he was the victim of child

⁷³ Irvine, C (ed), 'Anders Breivik 'apologised to mother for ruining her life'', 31 Oct 2013, The Telegraph <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/10418724/Anders-Breivik-apologised-to-mother-for-ruining-her-life.html>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

⁷⁴ Ibid

abuse, but also by suggesting that identifying factors in childhood could in some way lead to preventative action:

I've given more weight to the public interest. The fact is that he was actually caught by the system before the action, not by the security police, but in his childhood. He was within the system, but the system let him go.⁷⁵

Again, the interest of the public is foregrounded here in relation to Wenche's parental adequacy suggesting that there is some manner of obligation to the public played by journalistic investigation in revealing the factors which the narratives themselves are deeming fundamental. While the aim of *A Norwegian Tragedy* is not to elicit sympathy for Breivik, and is continually tempered with reminders of Breivik's own abnormality, and the horrific natures of the crimes he committed, judgement is temporarily shifted to Wenche's lack – of femininity, of adequate mothering. As I will explore in Chapter Four, reading narratives like this in terms of theories of scapegoating allow us to consider the social role that the media plays. In offering Wenche Behring Breivik's damaging parenting as a causal factor, the woman herself can thus be condemned by society alongside her son, rebalancing the social disharmony caused by the events. As we will see in Chapter Four, the rebalancing of this disharmony is precisely what is achieved by the symbolic expulsion of the scapegoat figure. The examination of the discursive way in which Wenche meets the media-led need for someone or something to be held accountable for the events allows her to be reframed in terms of scapegoated victim. Borchgrevink offers details of an early childhood psychiatric assessment of Breivik carried out in the 1980's:

⁷⁵ Orange, R, 'Anders Behring Breivik's mother 'sexualised' him when he was four', 7 Oct 2012, *The Telegraph* <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/9592433/Anders-Behring-Breiviks-mother-sexualised-him-when-he-was-four.html>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

Breivik was raised by a single mother who appears to have been seriously depressed and with an emotionally unstable personality. She had a particularly “pathological” relationship to her son, according to the report, at the same time “symbiotic” and aggressive. She held him close in bed at night while telling him she wished him dead during the day, describing the three year old boy as a violent threat to women. According to the report, Breivik was a victim of his mother’s projections of paranoid aggressive and sexualized fear of men in general.⁷⁶

The remit of this thesis does not allow for speculation into the influence of child abuse on adult psychopathology, nor does it allow assessment of the legitimacy of these allegations. What is crucial here is the notion of public interest and furthermore the pathological way in which Wenche herself is described. This is especially pertinent when considered alongside the masculine overtones of Jens Breivik’s depiction. As I will show in Chapter Four through an examination of Hillary Allen’s observations of the representation of male and female offenders this gendered difference in representation linked to deviance is commonplace. Allen (1987) notes that female experience is frequently coded as ‘mad’, whereas male experience is continually asserted to be normative.⁷⁷ His mother’s experience in terms of the psychopathological, both before and after the attacks, is, in the media, ostensibly unremarkable. Female experience is represented as fundamentally ‘insane’. The primacy of the public investigation into the adequacy of Wenche’s mothering raises questions about the adherence of the woman to socially appropriate standards. In suggesting that harmful parenting can be directly causal to such catastrophe, the media echoes Breivik’s suggestion that women have a responsibility for producing offspring that channel their masculinity in appropriate ways.

⁷⁶ Borchgrevik, A, ‘What Made Anders Behring Breivik a Mass Killer in Norway?’ 24 Nov 2013, The Daily Beast
<<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/11/24/what-made-anders-behring-breivik-a-mass-killer-in-norway.html>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

⁷⁷ Allen, Hilary, *Justice unbalanced: gender, psychiatry and judicial decisions* (Milton Keynes : Open University Press, 1987)

As Mortensen's employment of Irigaray's thinking shows, the Breivik case exposes the way in which the Western masculine ideal is held up as the model for normality. As we have seen, even Anders Breivik, who is ostracised completely from society as a result of his extreme actions, can be perceived as normative in at least some of his lines of thinking. The notion of Breivik being labelled as mad was met with a public outcry, with both the public and the offender himself asserting that an insane diagnosis would detract from the powerful political implications of his statement. The issue of gender reveals yet another point of convergence between Breivik's thinking and the social consciousness as represented through these publications. Breivik's "monstrous" nature and subsequent "snapping" is attributed in some form by both Breivik's manifesto and through the disparity of parental representation, to the denial of his masculinity by the promotion of women's rights. The masculine is constituted powerful, therefore, through the causal link created between its suppression and the catastrophic consequences.

An examination of the media's representation of the questions of psychiatry and criminal responsibility raised through this case offers an interesting insight into the social function of the media, as well as the representative mechanisms used. Questions of sanity raised in relation to the transgressive or deviant member of society demonstrate the fundamental link that has been established between notions of criminality and mental unity. An examination of the representative and narrative mechanisms at play here allows an examination of the ways in which cultural stereotypes are being produced and reinforced.

The various echoes and parallels between Breivik and the media makes this case a fascinating one, but also one that epitomises the fundamental need for an examination of contemporary discourse on madness and deviance. The notion that Breivik is in many ways a “normal” man contributes to the overtone of terror incited by both Breivik and the media. In reconfiguring him as psychopathological, abnormal and monstrous the media discursively denounces Breivik and symbolically expels him from society. However, Breivik’s echoing of this complicates the mechanism. While his statements are framed as the ramblings of a “madman” by the media, this is based on the presence of his ‘delusions’. While his particular ideological ‘delusions’ garnered no support and reflected Breivik as comprising a group of one, the structure of his statements simultaneously reflected a view of the world that is strikingly similar to the way in which the media views him.

Leader’s reflections on the notion that madness can be revelatory of the way in which reality is linguistically constructed are illuminating:

As reality decomposes in certain moments of psychosis, we find clues as to how it has been built up and constructed in the first place. The neighbour’s gossip, the allusions in the street, the remarks in the newspapers, the talking neurones and the brick that sends a message all show that the world has started to speak. Everything in that person’s reality has become a sign, communicating to them, whispering to them, addressing them: if reality was once silent, now it can’t stop talking. And for reality to be able to do this, doesn’t it suggest that it is made, in part, from language? (Leader, p43)

The numerous parallels drawn between Breivik’s verbal rationale and that of the media’s highlights the nature of the communicative strategies that are at play. In refusing – as both Breivik and the public does - the diminishing of his actions through the label of “madness” a demand is created for a re-evaluation of the discursive response to the “mad” deviant individual.

The Breivik case dominated global media channels throughout both the time of the event itself and during the process of the legal trial and psychiatric evaluation. The issues raised by Breivik's actions and by the socio-cultural response to him are fundamental ones in the consideration of the contemporary conceptualisation of madness and representation of deviance. The Breivik case exemplifies why an examination of literary and cultural representations of madness in this contemporary moment is so important. Furthermore, I have examined Breivik in such extensive detail because the case resonates so clearly with the novels that will be examined in subsequent chapters of this thesis. Each of the aspects I have outlined in my examination of the case are key aspects of the novels I am about to examine. The following chapters will develop further the discussion on the diagnosis and labelling of an individual as "mad" in response to their antisocial behaviour, and the complexities of their "madness" diagnosis on legal consequences. The role of the media in determining, exploiting and negotiating key terms and differences is also crucial, as is the question of scapegoating, which is complicated in the Breivik case by the murderer being both scapegoat and scapegoater. The Breivik case highlights the complex interactions between the normative and the transgressive in several areas that are fundamental to the literary representations examined here. This case is of singular relevance to the core questions I am asking in this thesis and for this reason seemed the perfect contemporary real-life example to use as a starting point.

Chapter Two: The Paradox of Personality

Despite the warnings of progressive psychiatrists over the years and the anti-psychiatry movements of the 1960s and 1970s, psychosis is still too often equated with the ways in which some people fail to fit the norms of society. - Darian Leader (Leader, p.4)

This chapter will examine the definitions and constructions of personality, and go on to raise questions about the ways in which the human subject is understood in contemporary society. Notions of personality are of central concern to myriad bodies of academic research in the fields of science, the humanities and social sciences, as well as in cultural - and even everyday - discourse. As part of society's quest to comprehend precisely the ways in which an individual's identity is constructed, is similar to and differs from, the identities of others, there must be a means of organising and processing the data collected. The individual is necessarily compared and contrasted with others, complicating the very notion of individuality and blurring the boundaries between the individual and their position in the context of society. An examination of this comparative process will reveal the fundamental social function of demarcating a centre by defining that which exists outside of it.

One of the most controversial contemporary diagnostic terms is that of personality disorder. By implication it is defined in terms of that which it departs from – **dis**-order, **ab**-normality, **dys**-function. Before we can begin to examine the controversies and representations of a disordered personality, we must first begin by attempting to define an “ordered” personality. It is precisely this endeavour that reveals the elusive and indefinable nature of personality itself. The foundations on which the diagnostic term personality disorder is based, and indeed the norms against which it is contrasted, are themselves extremely unstable.

Baker *et al* point out that the high volume of bestselling crime novels represented in modern publishing sales figures;

indicates that while we are repelled by badness, needing to situate it firmly as Other to ourselves, we are simultaneously fascinated by it. The lack of neutral, non-sensationalised and accurate widely accessible material on ‘badness’ not only increases the distance between notions of madness, sanity/difference, and otherness but also serves to further stigmatise individuals (Baker et al, p.53).

The novels being examined in this thesis do not establish themselves as accounts that address the stigmatisation of the mentally disordered individual through the representation of the suffering of the mentally ill. Nor do they construct the aforementioned sensationalised depiction of a crazed or evil “monster” or offer chilling or gruesome stories that perpetuate myths about madness for the purposes of literary entertainment. Instead they use their fictional status to scrutinise the ways in which these myths are constructed, as well as offering an examination of the binary that has been created by the ambiguous differentiation of criminal behaviour and psychopathology. As works of fiction their primary agenda is to strike a balance between representing the transgressive other in a way that compels the reader and holds their fascination, and drawing attention to the awkward questions that these representations raise about contemporary reality. While the metafictional properties of the novels are explored more thoroughly in Chapter Five, all of the chapters in this thesis consider, to some extent, the ways in which this balance is struck by the authors.

While many exemplifications of madness can be identified in contemporary literary fiction, it is rare to have a clearly demarcated diagnosis of a mental disorder. In Sebastian Faulks’ 2007 novel *Engleby*, however, the diagnostic process and diagnostic consequences are fictionalised and brought into the frame for the reader, with the

protagonist's diagnosis of personality disorder offered as a significant and climactic point in the novel's plot. The inclusion of a psychopathological diagnosis within the novel, as well as Faulks' detailed representation of the ways in which the diagnostic conclusion is arrived at, draws attention to the socio-cultural and systemic response to a human subject in the aftermath of a heinous crime. In choosing to outline his diagnosis, Faulks has brought the pathology of his character to the forefront of his text, with the reader implicated in the process of judging the values placed on "madness" and "badness" in the context of personality disorder and its depiction and reception in contemporary culture. The novels examined in this thesis all compel their readers to engage with modern attitudes towards insanity and criminality and to examine whether contemporary thinking equates extreme crime with insanity, and subsequently the impact this has on diagnoses and treatments of mental disorder in people who have not committed a crime.

"Ordered" Personality

According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2013), personality is defined as the 'collection of characteristics or traits that makes each of us an individual. These include the ways that we: think/ feel/ behave.'⁷⁸ Personality is defined with emphasis on individuality. This implies a vast scope of traits and characteristics to account for the diverse and varying personalities of each human subject. The definition's allusion to the uniqueness and distinctive characteristics of each individual person contains no suggestion of a "norm" or an average set of traits. It is revealing to note then, that, despite personality traits being representative of individuality, there is a means of

⁷⁸ <<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/expertadvice/problemsdisorders/personalitydisorder.aspx> -> [Accessed 24th April 2015] (paragraph 4)

classifying those personalities which can be deemed “abnormal”. Interestingly, abnormal personality is also configured in terms of expressions of individual attitudes and behaviours. The indication of abnormality necessarily implies a normality to which individual personality types should conform. In order to formulate a comprehensive typology of ab-normality, it is vital to understand the basis, the central core, of what is being departed from.

Abnormality of personality is currently located within a psychiatric/medical context. There are a number of clinical handbooks and typologies of psychological disorders that have been compiled – and frequently revised – to outline the diagnostic criteria and recommended treatments for mental abnormality. They seemingly, however, make little or no reference to a definitive outline of what a normal, typical, or even ideal personality is, against which the abnormality can be compared or contrasted. In fact, when alluding to the varying diagnostic approaches to the category of personality disorder, the DSM-IV-TR outlines and explores some of the ‘many different attempts to identify the most fundamental dimensions that underlie the entire domain of normal and pathological personality functioning.’⁷⁹ In stating this, the DSM-IV-TR confirms the lack of any one definitive model. There is, therefore, a wide and diverse range of models for personality types, but no clearly defined model for normal personality functioning, despite the vast range of ways in which an individual’s personality can be said to be abnormal, or disordered.

What is generally agreed is that personality is a relatively fixed entity, with hereditary influences and early formative experiences resulting in a general consistency of

⁷⁹ American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders, text revision (DSM-IV-TR)*. American Psychiatric Association, 2000. p.633

identity. In an attempt to examine the approaches used in the study of personality,

Gross suggests:

A useful definition of personality would be: those relatively stable and enduring aspects of individuals which distinguish them from other people, making them unique, but which at the same time allow people to be compared with each other (Gross, p.731).

Gross goes on to question whether personality is defined only by those traits that are permanent and enduring, and also whether the study of personality examines individuals as unique beings - the idiographic approach - or comparatively against the traits of others - the nomothetic approach.

In his definition of personality, and his evoking of the two distinct perspectives, Gross reveals the paradox of personality; the very nature of the attempt to define and categorise personality reveals its inherent social function – defining and categorising individuals as a means of designating what is abnormal, undesirable or other.

Personality is defined as a series of traits and behaviours that are particular to the individual and that facilitate the identification of what is unique in the subject.

Furthermore, defining personality in terms of ‘stable and enduring’ aspects contains within it the implication that in some fundamental, epistemic sense the very notion of personality itself is not in question. Instability and inconsistency of personality traits therefore would not only denote abnormality, but also surely draw attention to the lack of default “normal” or “ordered” personality that is being departed from. The definition of abnormality in the context of personality is examined in further detail below.

The ‘unique’ characteristics of the individual can only be comprehended in the context of social criteria. The notion of normality implies a framework, within which the individual must be situated and understood. Individuality is theoretical – in practise

there must be a way of understanding or of measuring the traits to allow the harmonious co-existence of the 'unique' beings. The notion of personality can only be accepted if it relates the subject to pre-existing models of the self. Kirby and Radford go as far as to suggest that 'a truly unique individual would be incomprehensible, in fact not recognisable as an individual' (Kirby and Radford in Gross, p.732). As we will see, the texts examined in this thesis raise questions about the myth of the truly unique individual. The incomprehensibility of the individual whose personality traits fail to conform to widely agreed but fundamentally unspoken criteria is what drives the need to create categories of abnormality. That which is held up as the paradigm of normality is in fact that which defines the boundaries to which the notions of individuality in a social context extend. Individual personality traits are constrained by the boundaries of the recognisable social norms, which are themselves unspoken, elusive and indefinable.

The five-factor model of personality dimensions represents the convergence of research into the structure of personality concepts since Fiske was unable to find evidence for a model more complex than one with five dimensions in 1949.⁸⁰ The model posits every individual human subject as situated somewhere on five separate scales, each corresponding to a dimension of personality. This model has been designed as a distillation of vast data about personality characteristics and behaviours into five traits that every single individual is said to be in possession of, to some extent. The way in which we differ from others is the varying level to which we represent these traits, reflected in high or low scores on each of the five continua. Our uniqueness – what prevents us from having identical personalities to others with exactly the same scores

⁸⁰ Digman, John M. "Personality structure: Emergence of the five-factor model." *Annual review of psychology* 41.1 (1990), (p418)

on these traits – is determined by our personal characteristics and behaviours, which are manifestations of the traits.

Nettle (2007) provides a table summarising the benefits and costs of each of the personality dimensions, which were outlined by Costa and McCrae in 1985 (Costa & McCrae in Digman, p423) - some five-factor models may name slightly different dimensions. (I have adapted the table below to exclude the detailed information Nettle includes on the core mechanisms of the brain which is extraneous to the focal point of this chapter)⁸¹:

Table 1: Personality Dimensions and their Benefits and Costs

| Dimension | Benefits | Cost |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Extraversion | Increased reward pursuit and capture | Physical dangers, family instability |
| Neuroticism | Vigilance, striving | Anxiety, depression |
| Conscientiousness | Planning, self-control | Rigidity, lack of spontaneous response |
| Agreeableness | Harmonious social relationships | Not putting self first, lost status |
| Openness | Artistic sensibility, divergent thought | Unusual beliefs, proneness to psychosis |

⁸¹Nettle, Daniel. *Personality: What makes you the way you are.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.) p208

The benefits and costs of each dimension are dependent on the situation the individual finds themselves in, and therefore ratings will vary - there is supposedly no 'ideal' score for any of the traits. But while there is no ideal or positive score, some individuals whose scores deviate from the average or centre of these spectra must necessarily be viewed as scoring in a way that is perceived as *not* ideal. Some of the traits are obviously beneficial, and seemingly high social functioning depends on having an abundance of some, and a scarcity of others in certain contexts. Regardless of context, however, the implication is that an excess or a dearth of certain personality traits represents an exceptional personality who is outside of the "norm". We can consider celebrities or artists as falling into this category, with artistic prowess or "star quality" being something that the average individual is seemingly not in possession of. There have been a number of studies into the links between artistic creativity and madness – and as Bentall puts it, 'overall the research is surprisingly consistent, and the long held association between madness and creativity seems to be a real one.'⁸² It is evident that being situated on the extreme ends of the spectrum is not necessarily always detrimental. With the explicitly listed costs such as family instability, depression and proneness to psychosis, however, behaviours found at the extreme end of a continuum are primarily negative and ultimately are defined as pathological. The notion of an abnormal (even if viewed positively) personality is represented through omission – normality is not represented by consistency, but by mediocrity – as that which doesn't stray too far from what has been deemed the centre of these five personality traits.

Nettle suggests that observations and predictions about personality should be measurable, giving scientific weight to the theories. He mentions the contemporary interest in linking personality constructs to underlying neurobiological mechanisms,

⁸² Bentall, RP, *Madness Explained: Psychosis and Human Nature* (London: Penguin, 2004) p. 114

which is backed up by corresponding neurobiological evidence gleaned from MRI scanning. He discusses contemporary research models of personality, which are currently founded primarily on perception of the self, by the self, or by others:

Much modern personality work is based on people's self-reported ratings of what they are like or more rarely, of what someone else is like. It is a fortunate development for personality psychology that data of this kind have turned out to be quite reliable, since they are the quickest and easiest data to collect (Nettle, p.19).

Nettle's dismissive reference to the 'fortunate development' of personality research being based on the self as defined by the other implies that the scientific approach to gleaning information about personality is prime, with the human observations merely strengthening it. The neurobiological approach, however, leaves aside completely factors such as gender, heritage and personal history – in fact the entire account of the human subject. Nettle's implication that the observations of personality psychology are coincidental manifestly disregards the evidence that points towards the profoundly social function of the very category of personality. Personality defines the self in comparison to the other, creating a group – and therefore a majority – that is contrasted to, and simultaneously defined by, those individuals that are anomalous to it.

Nettle describes how an individual's self-perception co-ordinates with the perceptions of others who have known them for a long time, increasing proportionally with the length of time the relationship lasts. Nettle's reference to the reliability of the data points to some profoundly unstable but widely accepted formulations. It draws attention to the importance of inter-personal relationships with others in defining our identity and reinforcing our own perceptions of our sense of self, highlighting the intersubjectivity of the personality dimensions. We can see that while it seemingly

pertains to the individual, personality is defined by the social – concepts of normality and abnormality depend both on how we view the other, and how the other views us. As we will see, many of the personality disorders are characterised by unstable or difficult relationships with others, as well as a perception of the self that differs from the norms and values supposedly held by the rest of society. In these cases then, the reliability of the assessment methods, and the conclusions about these individuals that are drawn from the results, can surely be viewed with uncertainty.

The elusive “normal” or “ordered” personality – which as we have seen is not textually defined – surely comprises those individuals with average scores in each trait closer to the centre of the scale. Nettle cites several of the personality disorders as being represented by those with scores at the extreme end of the scale. Schizotypal Personality Disordered individuals often represent an extremely high score in Openness – the trait most linked to creativity or intellect (Nettle, p.193). Conscientiousness – our tendency to adhere to rules, detail, systems or structures – situates Antisocial Personality Disorder at the extreme low end and Obsessive Compulsive Personality Disorder at the extreme high end (Nettle, p.150), indicating that either an excess or dearth of the traits implies a clinically defined abnormality. Our ‘other-regarding’ tendencies are represented by Agreeableness, but the finding that those diagnosed with Dependant Personality Disorder have extremely high Agreeableness scores suggests that there is a limit to normal, or non-pathological regard for the other (Nettle, pp.173-4). There is an implied boundary to how little, and conversely how much, one should regard and interact with the other. While there is no specifically defined ‘normal’ amount, there are diagnostic categories that demarcate the abnormal – which in turn implies normality in contrast.

Nettle states that the most extreme form of the personality trait Neuroticism manifests in Borderline Personality Disorder. He suggests that, as a result of their embedded personality types, sufferers make unrealistic plans due to a 'chronic doubt about who they are, what could make them happy, and what they are really worth' (Nettle, p120), positing their lack of surety about their own identities as what situates them at the end of this particular personality trait continuum, and in turn affects their ability to make realistic life plans.

Leader highlights the disturbing implications of the personality traits being used in this diagnostic way to demarcate individuals with disordered personalities:

One of the symptoms in the list of defining features of schizoid personality disorder, for example, is 'wearing ink-stained clothes.' The absurdity of this behavioural, external definition becomes troubling when we realize that it forms part of a diagnostic system that, if it can grant access to treatment and insurance payouts for some, it can restrain and section others, and have significant effects on their lives (Leader, p.32).

In the dimension of Extraversion Nettle's exemplification of the consequences of an individual situated at the higher end of the dimension further reveals how profoundly reductive the configurations can be:

Since high Extraversion scorers have an increased likelihood of affairs and of multiple marriages, their children are disproportionately likely to end up living with step-parents. Exposure to step-parenting is the strongest known predictor of child abuse, and exposure to divorce has measurable detrimental effects on children's outcomes. The rich but unsettled life of the extravert can thus entail real risks (Nettle, p100).

The excess of Extraversion depicted here has social and pathological implications, not only for the individual, but for their offspring. This indication of unavoidable - as the five personality traits are perceived to be relatively fixed entities - future tragic consequences originates a narrative that can be identified as underpinning some of the

dramatic alarming discourses that pervade contemporary reality. The impact of abnormal parenting on child development is examined in Chapter Three, while Chapter Four examines the ways in which the media perpetuates these narratives.

Despite personality being posited as a term that encompasses and applies to all of humanity, within it there seems to be an implicit binary set up between the normal, average or central, and those who are situated at the outskirts. These individuals are identified as abnormal, atypical and are often ostracized. While personality seemingly examines the individual traits of the human subject, in fact, it isolates anyone whose individual behaviours don't conform to the central norms of the group. The distinct lack of a definition of 'normal' raises questions about the much defined, categorised and analysed 'abnormal'. Is it the definition of the 'abnormal' that which demarcates by elimination, the category of 'normal'? Is normality, therefore, that which remains when undesirable or 'odd' behaviour is named and defined? It seems that the upholding of societal norms is dependent on the definition and expulsion of the abnormalities that they are contrasted with. Chapter Four further examines this notion, through an examination of the ways in which René Girard's theory of scapegoating can be applied to a reading of Zoe Heller's *Notes on a Scandal*, as well as to a number of aspects of contemporary discourse in general. Girard's scapegoat mechanism allows us to examine the discourses that surround the abnormal and pathological to reveal the profound social function that lies within them.

As we will see below, personality disorder is a controversial category, precisely because of its relation to undesirable behaviour. Despite it being a medically diagnosable mental disorder, it is often perceived as invalid as a mental health condition, precisely because it pertains to feelings, experiences and behaviours as opposed to psychiatric symptoms. In offering an explanation as to why personality disorder constitutes such a

controversial diagnosis, the Emergence Plus website – which is dedicated to offering information and support to those who have been diagnosed, as well as to carers and professionals working in the field – states:

It has been argued that [Personality Disorder] does not really exist but has been created as a way to understand and categorise certain feelings, ways of thinking and behaving to fit with the medical psychiatric system.⁸³

The implications of this controversy have a very real legal and socio-cultural impact, both on those individuals who are diagnosed, and on society as a whole. As we saw with Anders Breivik in the previous chapter, the refusal of mental illness definitions in the high profile legal case led to Breivik being ‘undiagnosed’ for the purposes of sentencing. His original diagnosis of schizophrenia was rejected and replaced with a diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder, which, for the purposes of the Norwegian legal system, was enough to emphasise his mental acumen in terms of his criminal responsibility. The case exemplifies the complexities of the defining borderlines between normality and abnormality, and between “madness” and sanity. Personality disorder is situated on the borderline between - and deeply frustrates - these binary terms.

Personality Disorder

As outlined earlier, *Engleby* offers a rare example of a contemporary work of literary fiction in which a diagnostic category is outlined and thoroughly explored. Personality disorders are often diagnosed in individuals who are deemed to have pathologically extreme high or low scores in one or more personality traits. The distinction between

⁸³ Hornstein, 2009, <http://www.emergenceplus.org.uk/what-is-personality-disorder/92-why-are-personality-disorders-controversial-diagnoses.html> [Accessed 31st March 2015]

the subject and the other is crucial to an understanding of how personality disorder is delineated. While many other disorders, either physical or psychological, pertain to the malady or distress caused to the diagnosed individual, in this case the other is implicated. The diagnostic detail considers the distress caused to the other. The disorder is rarely referred to in terms of the symptoms and manifestations experienced solely by the individual but is often described in contrast or comparison with others, or in reference to the impact the disorder has on the group, be it social, familial or clinical. The other, in definitions of personality disorder, is invariably plural. Personality disorder is defined by its discernible difference to the norm, which is in turn defined as the group of subjects to which the personality disordered individual is markedly external. We can consider again the personality trait spectrum, with the disordered individual situated on the periphery. An examination of some basic definitions of the term is helpful in clarifying how this distinction is embedded in the essence of the disorder.

- The International Classification of Mental and Behavioural Disorders (ICD-10) (World Health Organisation, 1992), defines a personality disorder as: *'a severe disturbance in the characterological condition and behavioural tendencies of the individual, usually involving several areas of the personality, and nearly always associated with considerable personal and social disruption'*⁸⁴ (Emphasis mine).
- The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR) opens its chapter on personality disorder by explaining that *'Personality Disorder is an enduring pattern of inner experience and behavior that deviates markedly from the expectations of the individual's culture'* (DSM-IV-TR, p. 685, emphasis mine).
- The NHS (2014) describes the condition in the following way: *'Personality disorders are conditions in which an individual differs significantly from an*

⁸⁴ World Health Organization. *The ICD-10 classification of mental and behavioural disorders: clinical descriptions and diagnostic guidelines*. (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1992).

average person, in terms of how they think, perceive, feel or relate to others'⁸⁵
(*Emphasis mine*).

The references to social disruptions and expectations of culture suggest that a properly functioning, 'ordered' personality encompasses individual expressions of traits, as long as they are kept within the parameters of what is deemed acceptable by the group. Or to put it another way, expressions of individuality must conform to societal expectations. We are reminded of Kirby and Radford's reference to the inconceivability of the 'truly unique' individual. While the expectation of social conformity sounds reasonable, in the context of psychopathology it radically complicates notions of normality. The disorder demarcates the individual as being different to the majority, diagnosing this as mental abnormality as opposed to celebrating diversity of character or unique personality traits. The individual is verified as being positioned outside of the realm of what is perceived as socially normal and subsequently deemed mentally 'abnormal' or 'disordered' as a result.

Even at this fundamental level, the definitions of the entire diagnostic category of personality disorder can be probed, raising questions that require further investigation and analysis. Firstly, the categorising of individuals as mentally disordered here depends on their difference from the undefined and elusive "normal" person. Secondly, the yardstick used to measure this difference is not based on their individual thoughts, feelings and behaviours, but these aspects of personality *in relation to others*. It is their relation to other people that is scrutinized, and ultimately, if this interaction does not adhere to a questionably defined set of social criteria, they are labelled as a disordered individual. As a result of the diagnostic criteria positioning the individual as different from the implied majority of society, diagnosing someone as personality disordered, by

⁸⁵ <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Personality-disorder/Pages/Definition.aspx> [Accessed 24th April 2015]

the very nature of the diagnosis, precludes them from being the subject to which another member of society can be defined as other. The normalcy of those in the centre is reinforced by the alienation of those individuals on the outskirts. They are diagnosed as different in the minority, and categorised as separate. In 2003 the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) published a series of guidelines to explore the ways in which the misconceptions about personality disorder could be addressed and tackled. The guidelines – discussed in further detail below – were entitled *Personality Disorder: No Longer a Diagnosis of Exclusion* (2003).⁸⁶ However, as we have seen, until the wording that fundamentally underpins the entire diagnostic category is considered, personality disorder continues to be – at a defining level – a diagnosis of exclusion and a diagnosis of otherness.

Much of the diagnostic criteria of personality disorder outline traits that convey this sense of otherness. The disordered individual struggles to make or maintain functional relationships with others, with these interactions under scrutiny across the range of the disorders. Outlined below is the DSM-IV-TR's précis of the personality disorder category. The ten types of personality disorder are divided into three categories – Suspicious (1-4 in the table below), Emotional and Impulsive (5-7) and Anxious (8-10) (*DSM-IV*, p.685):

⁸⁶ NIMH(E), *Personality Disorder: No Longer a Diagnosis of Exclusion*, Department of Health, 2003 <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130107105354/http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_4009546> [Accessed 2nd October 2013]

1. **Paranoid Personality Disorder** is a pattern of distrust and suspiciousness such that others' motives are interpreted as malevolent.
2. **Schizoid Personality Disorder** is a pattern of detachment from social relationships and a restricted range of emotional expression.
3. **Schizotypal Personality Disorder** is a pattern of acute discomfort in close relationships, cognitive or perceptual distortions, and eccentricities of behavior.
4. **Antisocial Personality Disorder** is a pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others.
5. **Borderline Personality Disorder** is a pattern of instability in interpersonal relationships, self-image, and affects, and marked impulsivity.
6. **Histrionic Personality Disorder** is a pattern of excessive emotionality and attention seeking.
7. **Narcissistic Personality Disorder** is a pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and a lack of empathy.
8. **Avoidant Personality Disorder** is a pattern of social inhibition, feelings of inadequacy, and hypersensitivity to negative evaluation.
9. **Dependent Personality Disorder** is a pattern of submissive and clinging behavior related to an excessive need to be taken care of.
10. **Obsessive-Compulsive Personality Disorder** is a pattern of preoccupation with orderliness, perfectionism, and control.

The list above encompasses a wide range of feelings, emotions and affects. Consequently, it could be suggested that personality disorder merely refers to extremes of feeling on the spectrum of human existence, rather than to a pathologically distinct set of criteria. However, it is the behaviours and acts motivated by these extremes of feeling that indicate the need for a pathology that denotes these behaviours as outside of

the realm of accepted social behaviour. Often, the acts that are the manifestations of the traits outlined above contravene rules, regulations and laws – in many cases it is a criminal act that reveals a disordered personality. It is this behavioural manifestation of disregard for the widely accepted social norms or cultural expectations that has clouded the disorder in controversy.

The aforementioned guidelines, *Personality Disorder: No Longer a Diagnosis of Exclusion* (2003), outlined the need for higher levels of support for both those individuals diagnosed with a personality disorder, and for those working with them in a clinical context (NIMHE, p20). While their function was to call for a significant modification of the ways in which personality disordered individuals had been prioritised and dealt with in the psychiatric system, the guidelines propose a shift in attitude and perception, rather than definition and approach (NIMHE, p.3). In calling for an end to the exclusion, the guidelines can be argued to expose that a personality disorder diagnosis is in fact conclusively defined by an individual being excluded from the group.

The guidelines revealed the attitudes of the medical profession and the wider public that underpinned the reason for the diagnostic field's previous neglect. They allude to the beliefs that there was nothing the mental health services could do for those with disordered personalities and to the fact that some clinicians disagreed entirely with the medicalising of personality disorder, questioning its treatability (NIMHE, p.23). The guidelines' aim was to address the dearth of funding, training and provision in the area of personality disorder up to the point of publication (NIMHE, p39). Emphasis is placed on multi-agency working (NIMHE, p39), with special focus on the high

prevalence of personality disorder in the prison population, creating links between the clinical and forensic services, which serves to acknowledge, and to further reinforce, the link between personality disorder and crime.

The guidelines propose a series of new treatment provisions for those diagnosed.

Referral criteria is based on the risk and distress involved both for themselves and for others, with equal, if not more emphasis placed on the impact personality disordered individuals have on their friends, family, clinicians and the public as a whole: ‘One of the characteristics of this group is that they often evoke high levels of anxiety in carers, relatives and professionals’ (NIMHE, p.12). Some of the treatment options that are proposed in the guidelines depend on a willingness to change on the part of the patient, but the guidelines also describe an ‘assertive’ approach being needed where patients are unwilling or unable to recognise the need to alter their problematic behaviours. The motivation for change, brought about by the proposed treatment, therefore, generally comes from others.

When outlining the need for investment in specialist training in the field, the guidelines state:

Working in the field of personality disorder is not easy. Staff need a high degree of personal resilience and particular personal qualities that allow them to maintain good boundaries, survive hostility and manage conflict. They need to appreciate the value of team working, be effective team players and feel comfortable working as part of a multi-disciplinary team (NIMHE, p44).

While this does not go quite as far as to outline the “ordered” personality with which patients’ disordered personalities are contrasted, the list of competencies needed to treat a personality disordered individual all reveal the strong emphasis that is placed on the links between the self and the other. The high values placed on team working

strengthen and reinforce the bonds needed between the group of professionals working to treat and address the offending behaviours of the disordered patient. This is highlighted as one of the primary objectives of the guidelines. In fact, this approach in turn further segregates the individual, negating a collaborative approach between clinician and patient and favouring instead solidarity between the group working together on the singular problem – the individual being treated.

In her history of the interaction between women and the mental health system since 1800, Lisa Appignanesi examines the category of personality disorder, suggesting that late twentieth-century psychiatric professionals viewed personality disorder as a diagnostic category in which problematic, deviant and criminal behaviours could be discarded. She says:

What are now called the ‘personality disorders’ have long taxed mind doctors and the legal profession. They have also called ethical categories and notions of ‘normality’ into question. What is society to do with a whole spectrum of people who may be dangerous to themselves and to others: people who don’t and perhaps can’t, without help, follow the rules of everyday behaviour that society sets down?⁸⁷

It is this distinction between the risk posed to the self and the risk posed to others that underpins much of the debate surrounding the disorder, and in fact that forms the distinction between some of the categories. In the borderline or paranoid categories of personality disorder, harmful expressions of the destructive emotions are directed inwardly, leading to individuals with this type of personality disorder being more likely

⁸⁷ Appignanesi, L; *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the present* (London: Virago, 2008) pp. 442-3

to self-harm than to harm others.⁸⁸ It is the anti-social personality disorder (ASPD) category in which harmful and/or criminal behaviour directed at others is most prevalent. These are often the cases that attract a great deal of media attention, leading to sensationalised tabloid headlines that allude to ‘psycho-killers’. Leading mental health charity MIND states that:

It is suggested that about 10 per cent of the general population have a personality disorder, and most of these people have not committed any crime. However, at least 50 per cent of criminals have a diagnosis of personality disorder, with a high proportion of those having ASPD. This is explained by the fact that criminal behaviour is one of the criteria for the diagnosis of ASPD.⁸⁹

It is criminal and/or violent behaviour - acts which contravene the governing rules and regulations that structure social co-existence - then that primarily categorises antisocial personality disorder. However, a distinct pattern across all ten types of personality disorder is, in one way or another, a rejection of the social. Whether this manifests in actively anti-social behaviour as demonstrated in the ‘suspicious’ types (1-4), or in a more internalised conflict and instability of feeling, the disorders all are seemingly identified by behaviour that goes against the collective. This leads to a further question of whether behaving in an anti- or non-social way functions as a way of rejecting the group and therefore leads to a diagnosis of a disorder categorised by its otherness. A converse explanation could be that the diagnosis has been created to meet the need for a way of categorising – and therefore better understanding - unfamiliar behaviour that does not conform to agreed social norms. Nevertheless, the representation of the deviant individual in isolation from the group, as well as the strengthening of the group

⁸⁸ <<http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/help-information/mental-health-a-z/p/personality-disorders/>> [Accessed 24th April 2015] (paragraph 10 of 24)

⁸⁹ <http://www.mind.org.uk/mental_health_a-z/8028_personality_disorders> [Accessed 24th April 2015]

bonds in response or anticipation, are both prevailing and dominant aspects of the representation of personality disorder.

Being Diagnosed

One of the primary reasons for the controversy that has surrounded diagnoses of personality disorder in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is the circularity implied, in which crime and personality disorder are inextricably linked. Criterion A.1. for Antisocial Personality Disorder as outlined in the DSM-IV-TR is a ‘failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviours as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest’ (*DSM-IV-TR*, p.706). This leads to a cyclical scenario – the individual commits the crime, and then the crime (as part of a pervasive pattern of antisocial behaviour) leads to the individual being diagnosed with a personality disorder. The diagnosis in turn means that the individual is categorised under the remit of personality disorder as having a mental disorder (or illness) which is purported to be the reason for which they committed the crime.⁹⁰ The Breivik case highlighted the instability of the diagnostic category and the enigmatic crux of the “mad or bad” debate, in that his diagnosis of personality disorder was enough to provide a pathologised explanation for his abnormal personality and for his crime, but also served to deem him *not* psychotic (or mad) for the purposes of sentencing.

Questions of causality are brought into play by the cyclical scenario – it is unclear whether the disordered personality has generated the criminal behaviour, fitting a medical or psychopathological model, or whether the criminal behaviour fits into a set

⁹⁰ McMurrin, Mary, and Richard C. Howard. *Personality, Personality Disorder, and Violence*. (Chichester: Wiley, 2009), p.10

of diagnostic criteria that serves as socially constructed categorisation. The paradoxical nature of the diagnosis raises questions about whether personality disorder psychopathologises criminal behaviour and diagnoses an individual “mad”, when they are in fact “bad”. Sebastian Faulks’ 2007 novel *Engleby* allows the reader to engage with the contemporary “mad or bad” debate, drawing attention to the complexity associated with a diagnosis of personality disorder and the profoundly unstable distinction between mental illness and criminality. The novel draws attention to the process of the debate itself, exposing our drive to categorise and to contrast the criminal individual’s experience with that of the collective.

Engleby’s diagnosis of personality disorder occurs as part of the aforementioned circular pattern of diagnosis following crime. He is arrested for the murder of Jennifer Arkland, a young woman with whom he has been obsessed throughout his time at university, and is subsequently diagnosed with a personality disorder throughout the process of constructing a legal defence for the crime. Engleby admits to the murder and so the purpose of the ensuing court case is to ascertain whether the diagnosis is sufficient evidence of ‘diminished responsibility’ for the crime, resulting in his confinement in a psychiatric unit rather than in a prison. The diminished responsibility clause – as outlined in the Homicide Act 1957 - will be examined in more detail in Chapter Three.

The criminal act that leads to the diagnosis is described in the novel in the context of a legal setting – with Engleby disclosing full details of the crime to his lawyer in an interview room. Faulks defers the description of the crime until this point in the novel through Engleby’s claims to gaps in his memory. This situates him in the role of unreliable narrator by undermining the authority of his own account: ‘My memory’s

odd like that. I'm big on detail, but there are holes in the fabric.'⁹¹ The reader's awareness of the fallibility of the account is engaged from the outset, alerting them to the need to carefully consider the version of events. Furthermore, by positioning the description of the violent act as a retrospective account, rather than describing it as it happens, Faulks diminishes the sensational and thrilling details of the crime that would otherwise function as the novel's climax. This operates as a stark contrast to media accounts and crime fictions. In displacing the crime in this way, Faulks draws attention to the expectations and the role of the reader, who are refused a vehicle for passive entertainment. Their interpretive role is highlighted, as Faulks draws attention to and raises questions about the careful construction of accounts that represent the deviant other.

Faulks achieves a balance between entertaining the reader and evoking an interpretive response. In the description of the murder, Faulks depicts the violence of the event by using words such as 'crack' and 'smashed', which thrill and shock, but achieves the delicate balance in his narrative style of muting this, which in turn shifts the attention from the act to the individual's depiction and affective response:

I swung it down onto the back of her head. She cried out and fell to her knees. I hit her harder the second time and I heard her skull crack. [...] I smashed it into the back of her head once more to be sure, then I broke her leg with it. I was intensely relieved that it was all over. I felt more like myself again (Faulks, pp275-276).

Engleby's invocation of the everyday, concluding his dramatic description of the interview with 'then a warder came in with some tea' (Faulks, p.277), creates a tension between *what* is being described and *how* it is being described. The stark lack of emotions - either of remorse or of "monstrous" ownership of the murder - implies a

⁹¹ Faulks, Sebastian. *Engleby* (London: Vintage, 2005) p.2

distinctly different response to that which is expected by the reader. Engleby's character is highly enigmatic, and the reader's awareness of their own response to this is heightened as the novel goes on to depict the ways in which the "otherness" of the individual is processed, understood and subsequently dealt with. Throughout the novel, despite it being a tale of a missing person followed by an account of a bloody and gruesome murder, the reader's attention is continually being focussed on their responses to the character of Engleby.

Violence is nevertheless a fundamental aspect of Engleby's otherness and psychopathological depiction, but is described in a retrospective and analytical – and thus neutralised - way. A history is created allowing for a narrative sequence that can be said to reinforce the diagnosis. In response to intimidation and bullying at boarding school - which further reinforces the medical model that positions the individual in the role of victim (which will be considered further in Chapter Four) - Engleby is drawn to violent but covert retaliations:

I liked to run behind a pimply little shit who's 'toileted' me and throw myself at his ankles, risking the mouthful of studs for the pleasure of hearing him hit the ground; and then he might accidentally get trampled at the bottom of the ruck that followed. I swapped boots with McCain who hated rugby but had metal studs; sometimes there was blood on my laces (Faulks p.58).

In providing a narrative history, Faulks indicates to the reader the objective of the mental health and diagnostic agenda to establish causal factors that explain the "otherness" of the disordered individual. Engleby's aggression in the context of a full-contact sport is socially acceptable, whereas it is pathological outside of this. His response to the blood on his laces unnerves precisely because of its absence of emotion.

He expresses no overt bloodlust or disgust at the blood, but observes it and narrates dispassionately.

Faulks also raises questions about the point at which society should intervene. In a psychiatric episode during which he has what he describes as a ‘panic attack’ and is hospitalised, Engleby describes his unspoken response to a shop assistant. The line spacing that separates what he thinks and what he says reveals the stark contrast between his inner and his public persona:

No, I want to take you out back and beat your fucking head on the floor.

‘Thank you,’ I said, and took the bag out onto the street (Faulks, p.185).

Engleby is diagnosed with ‘schizoid personality disorder with elements of narcissism and antisocial personality disorder’ (Faulks, p.289) following a detailed analysis of his verbal account, of witness statements about him, and - crucially - of his own textual account as documented in his journal, which forms the preceding pages of the novel. Exley, the psychiatrist appointed by the defence, analyses the journal/novel, chapter by chapter, explicitly making reference to the novel as an artefact. In highlighting this, Faulks exposes the fictionality of the novel in drawing attention to its difference from real life:

Personality disorder diagnoses can cause problems because in many cases the crime is the first evidence we have of serious abnormality. However, in the case of Engleby we have the extraordinary advantage of his own written account of the formative years of his life (Faulks, p.287).

The reader is reminded that they are not reading a real life account, as a means of highlighting the potential for socio-cultural reflection and scrutiny offered through the process of reading a novel. His reflections on the journal, especially his reference to its

chaptered structure, result in the novel becoming fragmented and draw attention to its several simultaneous states – Faulks’ work of fiction, Engleby’s narrative and Exley’s case file. Exley’s reference to the chapters draws attention to the profoundly unreliable nature of the descriptions of episodes, behaviours and attitudes that are taken into account in the process of arriving at a psychopathological diagnosis. The effect of the metafictional techniques employed by all four of the authors examined in this thesis is further explored in Chapter Five.

In utilising and explicitly naming a specific personality disorder, Faulks further draws attention to the reader’s role. Until the point of the diagnosis, the reader has been provided with an account of a distinctly ‘other’ character – which will be explored further below. There is a significant level of authority afforded to the diagnosis by the psychiatrist character, who is a compelling representative of the psychiatric system. His role as psychiatrist and his reference to psychiatric theorists give weight to his arguments and situate him as a site of authority. Exley’s notes echo the observations and reactions of the reader, which infer complicity between Exley and the reader, almost akin to colleagues conferring over a patient. Attention is drawn to the reader’s position as part of the group – or as in the NIMHE guidelines, as part of the ‘multidisciplinary team.’ The reader is discursively involved in the figurative ‘team’ that are responsible for defining and dealing with this individual. In being asked to consider whether they align themselves with the deviant individual, or as part of the group from which he is excluded, the reader can begin to view the structure of the representation of personality disorder.

For the reader, characteristics of this compellingly “other” narrator that seemed odd or eccentric in the preceding ten chapters now take on a new meaning and set of values in light of the diagnosis. In a society that is so preoccupied with psychopathology, the

reader may have even had lay-diagnostic suspicions and hazarded a guess at a mental disorder or condition. Engleby's descriptions of his awkward social interactions and reactions to events are now defined through reference to terms such as 'narcissism' and 'anhedonia' (Faulks, p.286).

Faulks also cites specifically the categories used to define the diagnosis of personality disorder as listed in the DSM-III-R. As noted in the thesis introduction, this is the version of the manual that is contemporaneous with the novel's composition. However, while the authority of the psychiatric system is again ostensibly implied, by dating the revised version of the manual to the one that would have been in circulation at the time that this part of the novel is set, Faulks reminds the twenty-first century reader of the continual fluctuation and variation - and thus subjective nature - of diagnostic definitions.

With the reader now able to place their trust in the reassuring presence of an authority that has defined the character of Engleby and is able to provide a narrative explanation for "what he is," the acceptability of the passive reading process is seemingly restored. However, Faulks' continual destabilising of this, and drawing attention to the role and expectations of the reader of a work of contemporary literary fiction, ultimately disallows this. A fundamental tension has been created, so that when the diagnosis is introduced, the reader is compelled to view it with scepticism and examine the *ways* in which the diagnosis of personality disorder is arrived at.

Through Exley's detailed analysis, Faulks makes explicit the extent to which Engleby exemplifies the diagnostic features of personality disorder, paying meticulous attention to clinical detail. This can be further illustrated by comparing an example from the novel with the criteria for narcissistic personality disorder as outlined in the DSM. The

manual suggests that ‘an individual with this disorder may complain about a clumsy waiter’s “rudeness” or “stupidity” or *conclude a medical evaluation with a condescending evaluation of the physician*’ (DSM-IV-TR, p.715, emphasis mine). This is exemplified in Engleby’s criticism of Exley’s clinical evaluation with the character’s contempt for the diagnosis stimulating the interpretive debate. The reader is positioned between Engleby and Exley in a narrative power struggle, with Engleby interrupting Exley’s report; ‘there were six more pages of this baloney and I will spare you the details’ (Faulks, p.290). According to the DSM, a key trait of personality disorder is that individuals often perceive their symptoms as ego-syntonic – normal (DSM-IV-TR, p.686). Failure to adhere to accepted social norms is what marks the individual as “other,” but by definition, the personality disorder diagnosis necessarily implies an inability to recognise their own difference. This stringent defence of their own normative position leads to what is deemed a perceived malfunction in understanding.

On one hand Engleby’s response can be read as symptomatic of his lack of self-awareness – referring as ‘baloney’ to that which provides a clinical explanation for what the reader has noted as peculiar – thus further reinforcing that the disorder demarcates and defines an individual operating at odds with the majority of society. The rejection of the diagnosis and the rejection of the norms of the group both form part of the evidence of the validity of the diagnosis. It is, in this way, a self-perpetuating diagnosis. On the other hand, Engleby’s incredulity towards the disorder echoes the debate that has surrounded personality disorder – socio-cultural scepticism towards a pathology of criminal behaviour and a diagnosing of an individual as “mad” as a result of behaviour that deviates from what is deemed by the majority as socially acceptable. The tension that is created by Faulks is further reinforced by the tension between the

narrative accounts provided in the novel, with the reader positioned between the accounts in an interpretive role.

Assuming a reader without a deep prior knowledge of personality disorder or psychiatry until the point of diagnosis, the characteristics of a markedly ‘other’ narrator have had the effect of being conspicuously odd but have not necessarily been revelatory of any clearly demarcated psychosis or explicit “madness.” Just as the process of diagnosis following crime implies circularity (the diagnosis arising as a result of a crime but the disorder preceding and therefore explaining the crime), the diagnosis half way through *Engleby* implies a circularity in our reading process. We can re-read the novel in light of the novel, attributing character traits and reframing him in the context of his disorder. The novel provides a reflective account of Engleby’s life from childhood. Once his otherness has been defined as a pathological condition, a reader may be compelled to return to the beginning of the novel to look for diagnostic markers or clues that may give evidence of the disorder in Engleby’s formative years, or, significantly, point to any contributing factors.

Engleby continually undermines his own diagnosis; ‘He nailed the moment I killed Jennifer and fully explained it. Defended narcissism in the face of intolerable threat to the self. His explanation was logical, all right; its problem was that it wasn’t true’ (Faulks, p.334). This has the effect of offering a counter argument to the psychiatric narrative that has been created, but also of simultaneously reinforcing it, through the representation of an individual who is unable to comprehend the perspective of the other to a pathological extent.

In offering respite to the reader, directly referring to the textual exchange happening – ‘I will spare *you* the details’ – Engleby asserts his narrative control, demonstrating that

he is responsible for orchestrating the level of information available. Engleby, retaining control of his narrative, comments on this, interrupting and undermining Exley at will: ‘Old Exley really liked to beef up his argument by referring to previous shrinks, mostly American, as though they gave his own amateur meanderings some heft and authority’ (Faulks, p290). While this serves as a further means of alienating the reader (having the subsequent effect of compelling the reader’s interest – again, further expansion on the metafictional properties of the novels is covered in Chapter Five) it also implicates the reader in the process of judgement.

By offering a comprehensive clinical explanation for Engleby’s difference, Faulks draws attention to the reductive nature of a personality disorder diagnosis by creating a tension, which is reinforced by offering the reader of a postmodern contemporary novel conclusive answers to the interpretive enigma. On the surface the reader’s role is seemingly made redundant with the introduction of the forensic psychiatrist, who has categorised and identified who and what this character is, and thus removed the need for the reader to do so. In destabilising this, however, Faulks draws parallels between psychiatry and fiction – both are occupied with the analysis and understanding of the human subject. In offering an all-encompassing medical explanation for the disordered personality at large to the naturally investigative postmodern reader, Faulks invites reflection, not on the diagnosis and categorisation of a character, but on the entire process of diagnosing and categorising – and reading – the human subject.

Social perceptions

Engleby’s interactions with others epitomise the definition of his diagnosis of Schizoid Personality Disorder, which is characterised as ‘a pattern of detachment from social

relationships and a restricted range of emotional expression' (*DSM-IV*, p.685).

Engleby's perception of himself and his perception of others vastly contrasts with the perception of him held by others, echoing the normative position of the reader.

Engleby's failure to censor the other characters' clear feelings of disdain or mirth towards him despite his alleged narrative control highlights the questions surrounding whether the disordered individual is skilfully manipulating, or is entirely lacking in, the perceptions shared by the majority. While willingly representing himself in such negative terms can surely be seen to confirm the diagnosis of otherness, it simultaneously raises questions about the carefully constructed nature of self-presentation.

Engleby represents himself as being on the periphery of any social interaction, seemingly by design. On a university society trip to Ireland he describes himself as understanding how to make friends, but on a theoretical level – while he cooks and provides marijuana to the group, this is depicted as an active attempt to secure his place as part of the group: 'Hey, man,' said Andy. 'Mike the cook's turned into Mike the pusher' (Faulks, p.31). His ultimate aim is inconspicuous proximity to Jennifer, creating a sinister undertone that taps into the contemporary social understanding of the psychopath who is able to "blend in" with the group, but is, under the surface, distinctly different from the "normal" individual. While on one hand Engleby's clear intellectual comprehension of the nuances of human interaction refutes the notion that he is "disordered" – or recognisably "mad" – his purposeful motivation draws attention to the aspects of his personality that are firmly non-social. He has no interest in forging conventional friendships or relationships, only to get close to Jennifer. Faulks' representation of Engleby's social awareness being extremely acute at some moments and extremely lacking at others highlights the enigmatic way in which the personality

disordered individuals are represented in contemporary culture. Furthermore it points towards social awareness itself as forming part of the 'constructed normality' against which the abnormal individual is contrasted.

The sinister undertone, however, is itself a seemingly artificial construction in which the character relishes the distinction set up between him and the group. Even when part of a group of people, rather than integrating, Engleby refers to himself as separate in predatory terms – 'When there are enough people in the bar, I move in among them' (Faulks, p.8). At this stage, before any violent or criminal act has taken place, it is this active severing of the connection with the social in refusing the company of others, or defining himself as part of a distinct category when among them, that forms the foundation of Engleby's otherness.

To others, Engleby is eccentric, absurd and other but ultimately benign. His lack of self-awareness is revealed through his own representations of others' perceptions of him. Jennifer refers to him as *Mike(!)*, his half-term school report states that he is 'uncomfortably aware of his own precocity' (Faulks, p. 60) and the character witness statement given by his only friend is transcribed directly, including uncomfortable laughter and reference to Engleby's social awkwardness, bad dress sense and description of the friendship being motivated by charitable intentions. This disclosure of these frank and negative appraisals in itself betrays either an unawareness of or total disregard for the opinions of others.

Engleby responds in a socially inappropriate way to external stimuli, which is interpreted as an example of his social awkwardness. The crime, and subsequent diagnosis of personality disorder, however reframes these examples and reveals the complexities of interpreting the motivations and expressions of the human subject.

Engleby's disdain for Jennifer's boyfriend during a televised appeal following her disappearance garners a social reaction of disapproval at his response – which is the opposite of what is expected socially:

I couldn't help laughing as I got up from my leather armchair and prepared to leave the others to their Bruce Forsyth. As I did so, a boy in front looked up at the noise of my laughter with a puzzled and slightly accusing look. He appeared to have tears on his cheeks (Faulks p.94).

The crux of the ambiguity surrounding the protagonist is evident here, with the reader obliged to ascertain whether he is pathologically unable to grasp social mores, or whether conversely, he has a deep and complete understanding, and is brazenly flouting these expectations while showcasing his guilt for the crime. The image of the 'evil' figure that is able to manipulate society and escape being held accountable for their crimes is positioned in exact opposition to the mentally disordered character who is unable to grasp the ways in which they 'should' respond. In revealing the ways in which these opinions, reactions and interactions are constructed, Faulks can be said to be questioning the moral implications of the implied duality.

Gwen Adshead highlights the role of societal expectations when considering the treatment options for a personality disordered individual, suggesting that society's difficulty lies in knowing how to respond to the labelling of an individual as mentally ill when their self-representation unsettles this image:

Many people with personality disorders, although claiming to be ill and in need, do not behave in the ways expected of a sick person. Perhaps we could understand this failure to fulfil sick role expectations as a type of psychological disability – an incapacity to obtain care effectively – which would undoubtedly convey a biological disadvantage in the long term.⁹²

⁹² Adshead, Gwen. 'Murmurs of discontent: treatment and treatability of personality disorder.' *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment* 7.6 (2001), (p409)

There is no doubt regarding Engleby's culpability - in fact, his admission to two other murders is interpreted by Exley as an attempt to strengthen his diminished responsibility plea. This suggests that Engleby holds the belief that a plurality of violent crimes is equivalent to an amplification of his madness. It is his willingness to admit to the crimes, with no attempt to convey the expected emotions of guilt, anguish or remorse - or even a lack thereof - that is crucial to the enigmatic representation of the individual. Chapter Four will examine the conflated representations of the deviant other in the media, but it is precisely Engleby's flat and measured admission of his crimes that thwarts the representation of him as the monstrous figure that meets mediated expectations. His madness is rooted in his refusal to censor his representation of his acts, which conveys his fundamental lack of regard for the social expectations of the other.

It is Engleby's apparent inability or unwillingness to form relationships with other people that reinforces the perception of him as a social outsider. When relaying conversations with others, Engleby often refers to his view that the other person is joking, or tricking him. Reference to humour frequently creates an awkward and disjointed impression, and elicits a sense of discomfort in the reader who, like the characters around Engleby, fail to grasp the humour that Engleby expresses. As we will see in Chapter Five, humour is necessarily a social act that requires the shared understanding of the other to be defined as funny. When the private space of his own bedroom is invaded by the police search for evidence, Engleby reacts with the social awkwardness that characterises his disorder. He says;

I thought of saying 'Now if you'll excuse me', which is what the person in my position says in every detective story ever written for page, stage or screen. It's a law. They can't not. But when I looked round their faces, I had a feeling that they wouldn't get the joke (Faulks, p.107).

Engleby's choice not to make a comment that would be perceived as wildly inappropriate arises not out of an attempt to conceal culpability or appear innocent, but from a judgement of his audience based on a deep appreciation of the textual nuances of the situation. Engleby's assessment is of the capability of his audience to comprehend what he perceives to be a highly stylised humour, not on their potential interpretation of his joke as being indicative of his guilty status. He considers himself and those with whom he is interacting, as adopting certain roles that he defines against stories, plays and films – fictions. This demonstrates his departure from the rest of society as being evidenced through his reading of all identities as being constructed. Subsequently what highlights his difference to the rest of society is an inability to *mask* the fundamentally constructed nature of identity. As demonstrated through Jennifer's diary and Exley's provisional psychiatric report, a conscious awareness of the textual drafting of identity takes place in private but individuals that function well in society refuse to allow this to be revealed in their public persona.

On the surface, Engleby's fascination with Jennifer's family, both prior to and following her murder, reinforces his obsession with her and invokes deep sympathy for the family, especially in contrast with Engleby's lack of empathy. They are seemingly the victims of the indiscriminate desires and consequential acts of a menacing individual. Our access to their reactions is through a series of narrative layers that allow for varying interpretations of implied meanings. Engleby appropriates Jennifer's description of them in her diary, which he steals, memorises and recites throughout the novel. Faulks creates a discomfiting parallel between Engleby's obsessive appropriation of Jennifer's diary and the utilisation of his own journal in the process of diagnosis. Faulks focuses on narrative intention, drawing attention to writers and their

audiences and to the ways in which accounts are constructed and interpreted: ‘I suppose it would be easy to parody, but I try not to be too hard on her. Although diarists’ motives are unclear, I really don’t think she meant anyone else to read it’ (Faulks p.173).

Engleby’s forensic appraisal of Jennifer’s mother’s grief, as it is depicted in the media, is reminiscent of the psychiatric reports that heralded a welcome sense of certainty and authority for the reader. Engleby comments on her request for privacy following the death of her husband, eight years after Jennifer’s murder.

She can no longer mediate with ‘the world’. So grief, from what I’ve seen, doesn’t look like a deep feeling that symmetrically mourns the absent shape; it looks like a disintegration of the acquired personality. It looks like going mad (Faulks, p.169).

Engleby perceives her grief as a refusal to enter into a dialogue with the rest of society and suggests that it is this difference, or otherness that is reminiscent of madness.

Madness is portrayed again, therefore, as a disintegration of the fabricated persona used to communicate with society. Engleby’s failure to grasp the contextual nuance once more typifies traits of personality disorder, but simultaneously comments further on the semantic ambiguity of the disorder in its parallel with the positioning of him as other through his diagnosis. His response is both a wildly inaccurate discernment of the emotional nuances of a situation, based on his failure to appreciate relationships with the other, and also an apt reading of the organization of contemporary madness. The disintegration of the acquired personality and failure to mediate with the world highlights precisely those characteristics that contribute to Engleby’s own otherness. This mise-en-abyme considers the link between the self and the other, and destabilises the entire category of madness by reframing it in terms of its social function.

Punishment or Treatment?

Faulks dramatises the process of attempting to ascribe a moral response that is appropriate to the nature of a deviant individual's transgression. Opposing accounts from the justice and psychiatric systems are depicted in the novel as operating in direct competition, battling for the definition of Engleby as mentally ill or as criminally reprehensible during the court case. This will be examined in further detail in Chapter Three. The outcome of the case defines whether Engleby is deemed either a criminal or a patient – excluding the possibility of him being simultaneously both due to the fundamental incommensurability of legal and psychiatric epistemologies. In drawing attention to this opposition, Faulks comments on the socially constructed borderline implied between the criminal and medical categories, demonstrating that a dichotomy has been constructed and is being continually reinforced.

The usual outcome of criminal behaviour is punishment. However, by attributing the criminal behaviour to the clinical remit of personality disorder, the punitive process becomes skewed. The perpetrator is treated rather than being punished, resulting in a change of social context: from prisoner to patient. However, by using the diagnosis to change the status of the deviant individual, the expected consequences of violent actions are, in fact, altered by society itself. The result of an accepted diagnosis as offering a causal explanation for the crime changes the criminal context, repositioning the individual as committing the act as a result of their mental disorder.

The circularity that is inextricably linked with personality disorder diagnoses as represented in *Engleby* implies that the person committed a crime because they are a personality disordered individual, but also implies the possibility that they were diagnosed with a disorder because of their criminal behaviour. The criminal acts that

are extreme and difficult to comprehend are therefore in themselves ‘insane’ acts. As Baker *et al* put it in *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction*, ‘[e]xtreme cruelty is equated in the mind of the public with madness – if they did this awful, incomprehensibly evil thing, then they *must* be mad’ (Baker *et al*, p.52).

Adrian Raine’s *The Psychopathology of Crime* aims to familiarise the reader with the biology of criminal behaviour and aims to explore whether criminal behaviour can be classified as a distinct clinical disorder (as opposed to a study of the mental health conditions commonly found within offender groups). In its introductory chapter he states; ‘Not only is it almost impossible to conclusively demonstrate that crime is a psychopathology, but also it is equally difficult to demonstrate that it is *not* a psychopathology.’⁹³ It is difficult to feel comfortable with this equation. Seemingly, by this criteria, any behaviour can be psychopathologised. Raine reinforces the complexity of attempting to categorise the behaviours and manifestations of the traits of those individuals operating externally to the mutually agreed social norms. Nevertheless, equating criminal behaviour with psychopathology would move to further mask the socially constructed nature of the expulsion of the individual. By determining that an individual could be said to be biologically unable to refrain from committing crime, that individual’s agency is surely entirely eradicated.

Raine explores the concept of crime as a disorder, examining it as something an individual can be biologically predisposed to, in opposition to the traditional privileging of social and environmental influencing factors. This approach refutes the opposition between criminal and clinical, and argues that the boundary between them that has been

⁹³ Raine, Adrian. *The Psychopathology of Crime: criminal behaviour as a clinical disorder*. (London: Academic, 1997) p.3

set up by establishing whether a criminal is *either* deviant or disordered, should be broken down. Raine suggests that this is only textually implicit:

It would appear that DSM-III-R has surreptitiously accepted the view that crime is a disorder, but rather than directly face the implications of this view, crime has instead been incorporated into the manual in such a piecemeal fashion that the concept of criminality goes almost unnoticed (Raine, p.16).

Raine's book, which was published in 1993, analyses the third revised set of diagnostic criteria which is the same edition that Faulks cites in the novel. Both the novel and Raine's hypothesis examine the understanding of the binary between criminality and madness in the same historical moment. The vantage point of Faulks' twenty-first century reader reveals that the elusive convergence of madness and criminality is still enigmatic.

The concept of an individual having their responsibility for committing a crime diminished - as exemplified in *Engleby* - arguably blurs this boundary between criminality and mental disorder, albeit not in the explicit manner demanded by Raine. The paradox identified through the examination of criminal behaviour being part of the diagnostic criteria for personality disorder raises questions about whether criminal behaviour can be medicalised. Raine's suggestion that criminal behaviour warrants an entire category of mental disorder in itself is arguably following this line of thought to its furthest possible extreme, and risks gross stigmatisation of those individuals with mental health conditions that experience disruption and personal distress, but in no way contravene the laws that govern the rest of society. Raine invokes the consequences of a criminal act, and the variation based on the individual's status:

Those who both break the norm and are caught face being ostracized and isolated from society by being sent to prison. Indeed, criminal behaviour

probably fits this definition as well as any other mental disorder; while there is an increasing degree of social acceptability to suffering from a disorder such as anxiety, depression or alcoholism, which makes these illnesses fit less well to this criterion, criminal behaviour has become no more acceptable...and as such is a good fit (Raine, p8).

In suggesting that there is evidence of a biological predisposition to crime, Raine supports the aforementioned suggestion that if an individual commits a crime, then they must be mad. Furthermore, as law is a human construction, it proposes that deviation from this group-fabricated set of criteria constitutes biological un-naturalness. Finally it privileges biological evidence over experiential evidence or anecdotal patient accounts, which would have profound consequences for the contemporary medical and legal systems.

As we have seen, the consequence of the crime committed by Engleby is incarceration, either in a prison or in compulsory residential mental health treatment. Raine's parallel between the socially ostracized and isolated criminal individual and the mentally ill person articulates the implicit questioning of whether there is a significant difference between the consequences of an offender being deemed "mad" or "bad". This was evident in the Breivik case, where members of the public initially expressed the opinion that it didn't 'matter whether he is locked up in a psychiatric institution or in a prison, as long as he is locked up.'⁹⁴ The eventual outcry against the coding of Breivik as mentally ill and therefore as seemingly receiving judicial leniency revealed that the difference represented by the ultimate consequences of violent crimes, and by the socio-cultural representation of the deviant other does, in fact, matter.

⁹⁴ Deshayes, PH. 'Norway split on Breivik's likely fate in mental ward, as mass-killer himself 'insulted' by ruling', 30 Nov 2011, National Post
<<http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/11/30/norway-split-on-breiviks-likely-fate-in-mental-ward-as-mass-killer-himself-insulted-by-ruling/>> [Accessed 23rd April 2015]

Engleby comments on his altered social status after his plea of diminished responsibility on the grounds of personality disorder is accepted and he becomes an inpatient in a psychiatric setting for an 'indefinite' period:

I was no longer a prisoner or a criminal; they'd taken off my handcuffs; I was a patient now. My identity was changed, from an object of vilest hatred to something broken that must be cured (Faulks, p.298).

In raising the issue of the offender's psychiatric state - which will be examined thoroughly in the following chapter - Faulks' novel probes this difference in types of incarceration and the perceived statuses of the criminal offender and the inpatient in a psychiatric setting. The novel positions the reader in the role of considering the implications for society about what these cases represent about contemporary reality.

The question of whether Engleby commits a violent crime because he has a personality disorder, or conversely is diagnosed with a personality disorder because he commits a violent crime is never answered. Rather than aiming for an account that condemns the individual as evil or elicits sympathy for them as a sick person, the novel draws attention to the *process* of the debate itself, exposing our drive to categorise, to contrast the criminal individual's experience with that of the collective as part of a quest for meaning and an understanding of why the crime occurred. While the diagnosis determines the outcome then, it does not preclude the crime that often serves as the first indication of personality disorder. Although the Royal College of Psychiatrists (2013) affirms that 'recent research has made it clear that mental health services can, and should, help people with personality disorders,' it has often been argued that because of the associated criminality, personality disorder should fall under the remit of the legal

system, rather than healthcare services.⁹⁵ The novel alludes to this debate, and to the complexity found in the legislation pertaining to psychiatry in the legal system, when Dr Exley asserts that Engleby is not suffering from a mental illness but instead suffers from what is classified in section 2 of the 1957 Homicide Act as an abnormality of the mind.

In 1997 the Society for Applied Philosophy organised a conference to explore the philosophical and psychiatric issues surrounding personal identity and psychopathy – which, as we saw in the introduction, is a term often used synonymously with personality disorder in many contexts. In a paper that arose from the conference, philosopher Piers Benn suggests:

In the case of psychopaths, the incapacity is one of understanding, and it entails a lack of engagement in any real moral dialogue with others, and a failure to participate in a shared moral world. Since blame and punishment are fundamentally communicative, they fail in their aims when it comes to psychopaths.⁹⁶

Again we can see that morality – as a shared experience – invokes a group that the individual is represented as external to. Legislation and clinical policy outline to the offender the repercussions of their actions, signalling social disapproval through punishment, or acknowledging clinically based mitigating factors. If punishment is largely communicative - as Benn suggests - in the context of dialogue with personality disorder, it is ineffective, transforming the moral dialogue into a one way discourse. The concept of failing to participate in a shared moral world posits the experience of the individual as external to the collective, which is arguably, in this context, the criteria used to designate an individual “mad”.

⁹⁵ <<http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/mentalhealthinfo/problems/personalitydisorders/personalitydisorder.aspx>>[accessed 28th March 2013]

⁹⁶ Benn, Piers, ‘Freedom, Resentment, and the Psychopath’, *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 6.1 (1999) p.35

McMurran and Howard examine the distinctions between punishment and treatment in personality disordered offenders, stating that ‘broadly speaking, the aims of punishment are to signal to society what is acceptable and what is not, and to prevent and reduce crime.’⁹⁷ In practice, statistics show that treatment, in many cases, works better than punishment in reducing the re-offending rate of those diagnosed with personality disorders, but it is nevertheless questions of treatability that have been at the heart of the controversies surrounding personality disorder. This argument again evokes the social function of a personality disordered diagnosis – if the perpetrator of a violent crime is diagnosed with a personality disorder, and is therefore unlikely to learn anything from punishment, then punishment ‘is purely for society to signal its disapproval’ (McMurran and Howard, p10).

After undergoing treatment for almost two decades, Engleby’s behaviours are seemingly even more entrenched. He becomes institutionalised, experiencing anxiety during a supervised visit to the local village, indicating his inability to function outside of a forensic psychiatric context. On one hand, this episode of anxiety triggers empathy for Engleby in the reader, depicting his vulnerability as he clings to the arm of his nurse and is unable to sustain a prolonged period outside of the hospital. In shifting the emphasis to the efficacy of treatment, Faulks subverts the reader’s expectation of moral justice which in turn reflects the destabilisation of the borderlines between criminality and pathology. The penalty for the crime is long term incarceration, with the difference being whether Engleby is perceived by society as a criminal or as a patient, and the consequence of this being an inability to be integrated back into society. However, as the diagnosis that directed Engleby to a clinical setting was characterised by this lack of social assimilation it may be argued that the perceived absence of any

⁹⁷ McMurran, Mary, and Howard, Richard C., *Personality, Personality Disorder, and Violence*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009) p.8

evidential change suggests that the requirement for justice is unfulfilled. The following chapter will examine the representation of the interaction between psychiatry and the justice system in the pursuit of easy categorisation of the disordered offender.

Chapter Three: Blurred Boundaries

*Those who wish to discuss issues of responsibility and the law take on the thankless task of stalking the boundaries between law, psychiatry and philosophy which, like most border territories, are matters of wars and disputes, of danger and confusion.*⁹⁸ – Michael Bavidge (Bavidge in Prins, p.16).

The terms ‘diminished responsibility’ and ‘abnormality of mind’ are unstable and fraught with complications that lead to socio-cultural confusion. This confusion contributes to the creation of, and simultaneous blurring of the boundaries between the binary oppositions, divisions and categories into which people are placed as part of the narrative that occurs post-crime. As we have already seen, mental abnormality is an abstract concept which establishes and reinforces the elusive normality that it purports to oppose. This is also true in a criminal setting, where the terms ‘diminished responsibility’ and ‘abnormality of mind’ lead to a category in which certain types of behaviour or individuals can be said to be distinct from the ‘normal’ notions of criminality. The representation of the point at which the disciplines of law and psychiatry are forced to interact - to examine the impact of an individual’s mental state on their criminal status - raises strong questions about the compatibility and co-operation of the two systems. As we will see, the psychiatrist operating in a legal setting is established as the spokesperson for an individual’s legal status and criminal responsibility. The psychiatrist has, however, been viewed by certain commentators (Griew, 1988) as being ill-equipped to fulfil the role expected of them, because of the immeasurability of the facets of human nature demanded by the law in the process of defining and categorising the individual. Both *Engleby* and Lionel Shriver’s

We Need to Talk About Kevin are novels that in various ways represent the criminal individuals whose mental status comes under scrutiny to explore the ways that the boundaries and liminal spaces are challenged and exposed. These challenges come from the actions of the transgressive individuals themselves, who can be said to interrogate the status quo through their extreme deviant actions and problematisation of society's structures. The novels examine the ways in which society systemically responds to these challenges. Using their representational complexities and by drawing attention to the largely unquestioned aspects of contemporary reality these novels explore the written accounts upon which the categorisation of the deviant individual is based.

While the calling of an expert witness to offer professional insight is ostensibly a straightforward part of legal proceedings, an examination of the role of the psychiatrist in a legal context reveals some of the fundamental incompatibilities of the legal and psychiatric system in their attempts to deal with the deviant human subject within society. The principal focus of the law is concerned with the moral acceptability of human behaviour whereas psychiatry is concerned with diagnosing illness and disorder and prescribing treatment. The point at which the two systems meet - in cases which discuss the legal, mental, or symbolic definition of the 'mad' criminal - forms a type of liminal space. The borderline between the mentally ill and the criminal is complex, and is heavily problematised by deviant individuals such as those represented by the protagonists of novels such as *Engleby* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin*.

While the psychiatrist's role involves being able to pass comment on the person's mind as being designated abnormal from a diagnostic point of view – whether, for example, the individual's thought patterns, feelings and behaviours align with a pre-existing disorder listed in the DSM – they are not legally qualified to be able to comment on

whether this abnormality is enough to substantially diminish a person's criminal responsibility. In cases of personality disorder, when the disorder can be diagnosed as a result of the crime, the psychiatrist can use criminal acts as evidence of behaviours that signify diagnostically that there is a mental illness or abnormality of mind. Behaviour that is outlined in law as being morally and legally reprehensible is used as the crime for which a person is being punished and the thing for which they are to be treated. Personality disorder – where an individual's criminality is deemed part of their mental disorder - throws the notion of diminished responsibility into crisis. The individual's status in the legal setting must be defined as *either* criminal – and therefore fully responsible – *or* mentally abnormal – and therefore suffering from diminished responsibility. The objective of the legal trial to ascertain the level of a person's criminal responsibility precludes the possibility of the transgressive individual being both criminal *and* mentally abnormal.

Diminished Responsibility and Abnormality of Mind

The notion of 'diminished responsibility', introduced into English statute in section 2 of the Homicide Act 1957,⁹⁹ offers a reduction of criminal liability in murder cases. If a plea of diminished responsibility is accepted, the offence is downgraded from murder to manslaughter on the grounds that the person that committed the crime cannot be held fully accountable for their actions because they suffer from an abnormality of mind.

The clause states:

Persons suffering from diminished responsibility.

Where a person kills or is a party to the killing of another, he shall not be convicted of murder if he was suffering from such abnormality of mind (whether

⁹⁹ <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/Eliz2/5-6/11/section/2>> [Accessed 24th March 2015]

arising from a condition of arrested or retarded development of mind or any inherent causes or induced by disease or injury) as substantially impaired his mental responsibility for his acts and omissions in doing or being a party to the killing.
(Section 2(1))¹⁰⁰

The clause contains within it an acceptance of the person's guilt for carrying out the criminal actions – the person has indubitably killed or been party to a killing – and there is no doubt, therefore, either that the physical act took place or that it was this individual in question that killed the victim. The clause, however, offers a simultaneous reduction of this guilt in the case of a person with diminished mental capacities. This means that while their carrying out of the act is not in question, the extent to which they can be held responsible for doing so is liable to legal debate – and crucially, altered punitive consequences. This enigmatic issue is central to the representations of contemporary society found in the novels examined by this thesis. The notion that a legal clause can acknowledge that an individual committed a crime and simultaneously deem them not wholly responsible for having done so reveals the complexity of the human subject; and more so the complexities of the systems that are in place to define and control deviance and transgression. “Madness” is a significant aspect of the contemporary legal system, offering an explanation for extreme deviance. While on one hand this diminishes the impact of the crime and offers support for the “mad person”, on the other it leads to the stigmatisation of mental illness and the reinforcement of the notions of abnormality. The legal consequences of extreme crime are physical detention, either in prison or in a secure psychiatric unit. Although the latter seems to offer a sympathetic vantage point and leads to what can be perceived as a favourable outcome, symbolically the person becomes ostracised – and excluded from

¹⁰⁰ [Ibid](#)

notions of “normality” - through their being defined as having an “abnormality of mind.”

The individual whose plea of diminished responsibility is accepted by a court is therefore deemed as being less legally liable for their actions than a comparable individual who can be said to have *not* been suffering from an abnormality of mind. While the legal term does not acquit a person of the crime, it alters the way that they can be punished by reclassifying them as different from a normal perpetrator. This reclassification destabilises the definition of both the individual and the act itself. The severity of the act is lessened and the individual is viewed in terms of their mental illness as opposed to their ‘criminality’.

The examination of the mind is necessitated because common law states that criminal culpability can only be liable where an individual’s *actus reus* – guilty act – is accompanied by knowledge and understanding of the criminality of the act being carried out - *mens rea* or guilty mind.¹⁰¹ It is necessary for the court to show that the individual was acting with criminal intent – i.e. that they knew that their actions were legally wrong and that they disregarded that knowledge before carrying them out. To determine a person as having a diminished responsibility for their criminal acts means ascertaining that they suffer from an abnormality of mind. As we saw in Chapter Two, a model for mental normality has yet to be established, and therefore the concept of an abnormal mind is subjective, open to interpretation and often measured against the intangible qualities of a *normal* mind. In defining a state of mind that diminishes the individual’s criminal intent, there is a causal link established between a person’s mental state and their liability for criminal acts they commit, raising questions about “normal” and “abnormal” criminality.

¹⁰¹ < http://www.sagepub.com/lippmanstudy/state/oh/Ch04_Ohio.pdf > [Accessed 24th April 2015]

In 1986 a reformulation of the Homicide Act was proposed, which included changing the wording of Section 2 to remove ‘abnormality of mind’ and replace it with the term ‘mental disorder’.¹⁰² The purpose of the suggested change was to ensure that legal systems were relying more heavily on the Mental Health Act and thus ensuring clearer clinical definition of the mental impairment that substantially diminished the legal responsibility. The implication of the suggested rewording was, therefore, that only a clinically demarcated mental illness could be said to diminish a person’s responsibility for their criminal actions. This in turn would have required diagnostic criteria to be relied upon to determine definitively whether or not a person’s criminal act can be attributed to their mental illness, creating a causal link between madness and crime. Ultimately this would disqualify a person diagnosed with a mental illness from being viewed as a full legal subject. The suggested rewording was not accepted, but the reformulation reveals the increasing scepticism towards the clause’s inability to clearly and concisely define an ‘abnormal mind’ and the ways in which this may be said to diminish a person’s responsibility for their criminal actions.

The wide scope of the phrase ‘abnormality of mind’ allows the diminished responsibility plea to be applicable to a number of cases and scenarios. People that kill, for example, in retaliation to abuse or domestic violence are able to be considered under the remit of diminished responsibility and therefore can avoid being subject to the heavier sentencing implications of a murder conviction. Crucially, the clause allows the law to express sympathy for the circumstances of these individuals. While their retaliatory behaviour cannot be legally condoned, the extreme circumstances that led to the individual’s actions can be recontextualised, with the perpetrator of the crime in the

¹⁰² Griew, E. ‘Reducing murder to manslaughter: whose job?’ *Journal of medical ethics* 12.1 (1986): 18-23.

role of victim. The notion of the victim status of those who commit crime will be discussed in terms of René Girard's scapegoat phenomenon in the following chapter.

Edward Griew suggests that, in the cases of abuse or where the perpetrator was under extreme duress, the clause is favourable to the court for a number of reasons, but has led to a lack of clarity in the legal system. According to Griew, diminished responsibility allows for courts:

humanely using it to produce a greater range of exemption from liability for murder than its terms really justify. The killing performed in grief or from compassion is quietly taken out of the murder category when the terse judgment "diminished responsibility" is offered by the expert to a receptive court. But there is no getting away from the fact that the use of this stretching device has depended upon the willingness of psychiatrists to assert their own views of the proper borderline between murder and manslaughter.¹⁰³

While the phrase 'abnormality of mind' may offer such subjects a certain level of legal shelter, the association necessarily redefines their mental experience and state. An individual who retaliates violently to abuse is defined, regardless of the contributing factor, as having an abnormal mental experience.

Griew maintains that the wording of the diminished responsibility clause affords the psychiatrist room to go substantially further than their remit – which ordinarily is to comment on the presence or absence of mental disorder and the ways in which it has affected the deviant individual. In a contemporary legal setting the psychiatrist is instead required to offer a description of the extent to which the mental disorder has affected the *individual's legal accountability*. He intimates that, to manipulate the purpose of the court to account for the abnormal circumstances, the psychiatrist is in fact able to grammatically and syntactically

¹⁰³ Griew, Edward. 'The future of diminished responsibility.' *Criminal Law Review* (1988): p.79

construct a clinical finding that comes within the wording of the Homicide Act.

Although they are not legally bound to concur, the jury can accept this ‘as a bridge between his description and their judgement,’ (Griew 1986, p22) allowing psychiatry to facilitate the extenuating circumstances and account for what would otherwise be understood to be an ‘evil’ or immoral act.

Constructive Consequences

In conditions such as personality disorder, where the crime is often among the first of the diagnostic criteria, we have a ‘chicken or egg’ scenario, raising complex questions about whether the individual is deemed disordered because of their criminal acts, or whether their criminal acts are as a result of their psychopathological disorder. With the defining characteristics of personality disorder being so ambiguous, a personality disordered individual who pleads diminished responsibility must be found to have an abnormality of mind before the plea can be accepted. The statistic provided by MIND that over 50 percent of the UK prison population has a personality disorder diagnosis, as cited in the previous chapter, shows that the diagnosis itself is not always enough to constitute diminished responsibility, hence the ambiguity and controversy surrounding the disorder. In antisocial personality disorder where crime is often the primary diagnostic marker (‘failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviours as indicated by repeatedly performing acts that are grounds for arrest’ – *DSM-IV-TR*, p.706), the abnormality of mind in this context surely constitutes the impulse to commit the crime. In a murder/manslaughter case this means that it is the urge to kill or violently assault the other person that is deemed mentally abnormal. Important questions are raised here about what differentiates the personality disordered individual’s crime from a “normal” minded individual who kills.

If this is the case, and to take this problem of definition and categorisation to its logical conclusion, should all people who kill be diagnosed as having a personality disorder that constitutes an abnormality of mind? Accepting this, and taking the argument a step further, if all people who kill can be diagnosed as personality disordered and can therefore be said to have diminished responsibility for their criminal actions, the differentiation between the crimes of murder and manslaughter becomes blurred. Murder as a criminal category therefore becomes defunct, as diminished responsibility reduces the sentence to manslaughter. The epistemological circularity established between criminal act and clinical diagnosis impacts directly on the person's status as a legal subject. Both Faulks and Shriver pose these fundamental questions through their representations of the social and legal categorisation and narration of their respective protagonists post-crime.

Faulks examines the complexity of the diminished responsibility clause in *Engleby*, from the perspective of the personality disordered individual, whose diagnosis allows for the identification of an outlook that differs from – and challenges – the status quo. Engleby refers to his diminished responsibility plea as 'the loony defence' (Faulks p.271), and includes within his first person narrative excerpts of other perspectives that are seemingly reproduced verbatim. The forensic psychiatry report included within the novel offers an insight into the clinical profile of the protagonist and the way he is perceived by his peers (through the witness statement provided by his only friend), although this is complicated by both his personality disorder diagnosis and by his unreliable narrative style. As we saw in Chapter Two, and as will be further examined in Chapter Five, while the reader suspends their disbelief, the reader's trust in the

account provided by the disordered individual is stretched, leading to a heightened tension that increases the narrative significance of what is being described.

Faulks, alerting his reader to the real life socio-legal structures that are in place to categorise and process deviant individuals, explicitly cites Section 2 of the Homicide Act, and goes on to scrutinize its wording through a depiction of the process of compiling a legal report. In doing so he depicts the narrative process of arriving at the conclusion that an individual's mind is so abnormal that it can be said to have diminished their legal responsibility. The legal report is described as being provisional, with references made to remind the reader that it is in draft form only. In the report, which outlines exactly how Engleby meets the criteria for a diminished responsibility plea, forensic psychiatrist Dr Exley specifies:

The 'abnormality' must arise from arrested or retarded development (no); disease (e.g. schizophrenia; no); injury (no); or inherent causes. It's this loose category that M.E. fits, and his own narrative shows us how (Faulks p.292).

In drawing attention to Engleby's own narrative deductive process, Exley simultaneously reminds the reader that the forensic psychiatrist is depicted in the process of putting together his own account. This is reinforced by the dismissal of the possible causes for abnormality of mind that are outlined in the parentheses as well as notes alerting his secretary to the possible revisions to be made to the text. By including the direct references to the legal guidelines, Faulks signposts his reader to the wider debate surrounding the provisionality of the practical application of diminished responsibility, echoing this through Exley's transitory report. This passage draws attention to the fact that, as well as the diminished mental states caused by physical injury, disease or arrested development, the clause contains within it wording nebulous

enough to be applicable to all ‘other’ cases. Exley includes Engleby in the catch-all category of ‘inherent causes’, reminding us that it is precisely the ‘otherness’ represented in Engleby’s own narrative that establishes his abnormality of mind. Furthermore ‘inherent’, pertaining to that which is ‘permanent or essential’¹⁰⁴ in an individual implies a crime that has been committed as the result of qualities in the individual that are immutable.

In order to establish whether or not a person’s mind can be deemed normal or abnormal in a criminal context a psychiatrist, acting - as Exley does in *Engleby* - as expert witness, can offer comment on the defendant’s mental state before, during and after the killing took place. We saw this in the Breivik case, where Norwegian statute demanded that the psychiatrists comment on Breivik’s mental state to ascertain whether he could be held accountable for his crimes. The diagnosis ultimately given to Breivik of personality disorder was used as a stabilising feature. The initial psychiatric report that defined him as psychotic offered a familiar contextualisation for the Norwegian – and in fact global – public as they began trying to understand the events. The notion that a “normal” individual actively chooses to commit such a heinous crime is unfathomable in contemporary culture, and Breivik’s definition as ‘mad’ attempted to provide an explanation for how a human subject could commit such an act. However, when this definition as ‘mad’ appeared to be directing Breivik to ostensibly more lenient consequences, the diagnosis was reviewed and overturned, fundamentally undermining the very notion of psychiatric diagnoses in a legal setting. In the second evaluation he was deemed ‘not psychotic,’ which thus responded to the public outcry against the madness allowing him to ‘get away with murder’. His re-diagnosis as personality

¹⁰⁴ Concise Oxford English Dictionary 11th edition (revised) (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006).

disordered met the requirements for him to be treated as a fully accountable criminal individual, but was still a socio-cultural representation of him in terms of mental disorder that meant he could be comprehended as abnormal. Personality disorder in this case is represented in the same ‘catch-all’ terms that Faulks points to in *Engleby*.

Through his exploration of a personality disordered individual’s plea of diminished responsibility, Faulks not only represents the criminal individual but also depicts the systemic tension surrounding psychiatric evidence in a murder trial. Opposing accounts from the legal and psychiatric systems are depicted as operating in direct competition, battling for the definition of Engleby as “mad” or “bad” during the court case. Notions of the unintelligible psychosis of those labelled “mad” are precluded by Engleby’s insightful and dynamic observations of the proceedings, which are akin to a sporting commentary on a boxing match. This serves to satirise the tension of the legal and psychiatric relationship by emphasising its combative nature. Engleby refers to attacks and counter-attacks between the prosecution and defence:

He was good; after a wobble, he was really good. So was Harvey, who was very alert – a bulky man fast on his feet – and quick to see which way the judge was leaning (Faulks, p303).

The outcome of the battle between the legal and the psychiatric systems defines whether Engleby is deemed either a criminal or a patient – excluding the possibility of him being simultaneously both. In drawing attention to this opposition, Faulks comments on the socially constructed borderline implied between the criminal and medical categories, demonstrating that a dichotomy has been constructed and is being

continually reinforced by the profound incompatibility of the psychiatric and legal systems.

In portraying the realms of psychiatry and law locked in a court room battle, Faulks both depicts the contemporary state of the interconnection between psychiatric and legal affairs, and uses his novel to challenge the reader to question whose remit the notion of criminal responsibility is. Engleby ironically implies his own active participation in the proceedings from the post-crime passive space of the dock. Engleby states:

We all agreed that the key issue was the degree to which my judgement had been impaired by my mental condition (Faulks, p.302).

By including himself in the reference to a collaborative ‘we’, Engleby endows himself with an agency that he does not possess in the context of the court proceedings. His brazenly detached reflectivity borders on the humorous as he observes proceedings in an inappropriately passive tone, reflecting and reinforcing his distance from the “normal” offender whose expected reaction would be one of fear, contrition or fervent denial. This passivity, however, contains within it a grain of perspicacity – symbolically he *is* in a post-crime context and *is* therefore entirely passive. From the dock the offender is no longer an active participant in the series of events. He has committed the crime and is now a defendant, whose role is purely to be socially, psychiatrically and legally judged on the criminal act he has committed. He no longer has a role to play in the theoretical designation of criminal or clinical meaning – his symbolic status is a matter for the court to debate. Faulks subtly draws attention to the call and response of the crime itself and the socio-legal interpretation of it. Engleby goes on to say:

Tindall argued that the measure of this was as much moral as medical and that psychiatrists had no special expertise here – any more than his lordship or the jury. It was a matter of common sense and ‘gut’ feeling (Faulks, p.302).

While psychiatry views the individual’s actions as symptomatic, and the legal profession perceives them to be matters of morality, the ultimate decision nevertheless lies with the jury. Faulks draws attention here to the fact that the ultimate decision on criminal responsibility in fact falls within the remit of the lay person – the representative of society. We see again that the criminal individual is posed as being at odds with the collective, which will be examined in further detail in the following chapter.

The reader is given, in Engleby’s case, the same material to judge that the psychiatrist and court are given as evidence – that is, the journal that documents Engleby’s life to the point of diagnosis. The entire novel is demarcated as a case file from which we can glean vital diagnostic markers (the metafictional implications of this will be explored further in Chapter Five). In the previous chapter we considered Faulks’ employment of the psychiatrist character to position his reader as part of a ‘multidisciplinary team’. Similarly, in the representation of the legal process, Faulks’ reader is positioned alongside the jury in the role of interpreting the evidence given, and judging whether or not the character’s mind can be said to be abnormal. This establishes the reader as part of the group ascertaining the extent to which Engleby can be deemed abnormal and, crucially, located on the outside of the normative group, subsequently allowing the reader to reflect on the veiled social processes that are in place to deal with the transgressive individual.

In contrast to the lawyer and the expert witness representing the psychiatric perspective, however, the reader will not (usually) possess an expert knowledge of legal or clinical definitions. The reader must therefore not only judge the idiosyncrasies of the human subject, but judge the structures that make up the legal and clinical systems into which the person must fit from a position of non-knowledge. Faulks highlights the role of the jury, who form a group of people that must conform to agree upon a single verdict. In drawing attention to the reader's role and its parallels with the process of "reading" a legal or a clinical subject, Faulks also invites the reader to question what is deemed normal or abnormal, how this is done, and by whom.

Manipulation

The presence of a psychiatrist in a legal setting has become a commonplace feature in representations of the "mad" or deviant individual. However, as we saw with the public's rejection of the diagnosis in the Breivik case, contemporary social attitudes towards the suggestion of mental disorder exonerating crime imply a view of the psychiatric defence that is loaded with scepticism. The evidence that establishes the individual's abnormality of mind is that offered by a psychiatric expert witness, which in itself depends on an analysis of the communicative relationship between two people. So while a psychiatrist's role in identifying and outlining the diagnostic criteria is crucial in a diminished responsibility case, the onus placed on the psychiatrist to comment on the deviant individual's "true" mental state has led to ambiguity surrounding the psychiatric defence. Stephen Frosh summarises the complexity of the relationship between the analyst and the individual, and highlights both its advantages and its limitations:

I cannot know myself fully (because I am in myself); that is why I need the psychoanalytic dialogue, in which I see myself from the vantage point of

the other. So an other can get closer to my self than I can myself, even though I am embedded within it and am the only one who has direct access to it. And how does that other, the psychoanalyst, know anything about the inner workings of my self? Because the analyst hears what I say, sees what I do, and can make a judgement about the nature of the structure from which these things arise. Thus, the analyst can only reason my self into being; she or he can never observe it directly; I, on the other hand, am too close to see it at all.¹⁰⁵

The discursive approach to diminished responsibility is that it entails the potential that a lighter penal result can be generated through criminals ‘playing the mental health card’, with the aim of achieving the supposedly preferable facilities of a psychiatric setting over a prison. This creates the sense that a miscarriage of justice has been achieved by a deviant individual who is able to deceive the psychiatrist, and in turn the legal system. The transgressive figure is represented as conniving which in turn reveals social attitudes towards madness and criminality. Both *Engleby* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* represent the social uncertainty surrounding deviant individuals’ approaches to court proceedings, and both novels portray the suggestion that their protagonists strive to be *perceived* as having an abnormality of mind in order to achieve a more favourable outcome. This throws the very notion of madness into doubt – on one hand, an individual “must be mad” to commit such a horrific crime, but on the other madness is depicted as a fictional entity that can be feigned or performed. The novels also query this aspect of the debate through their representation of the differing treatments of prison and what are perceived as the “lighter” options of juvenile detention and mental health settings.

After drawing out the complex nature of his diagnosis and echoing the approach of the prosecution by being scathing about psychiatrists’ theories as we saw earlier, Engleby

¹⁰⁵ Frosh, Stephen. *Identity Crisis: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and the Self* (New York: Routledge, 1991) pp2-3

flippantly summarises the supposed benefits of being defined as having an abnormal mind:

But then again, if the court can be made to see it Exley's way I'll get to pass my time being scrutinised in a hospital – albeit with razor wire and maximum security – rather than being banged up in a 'normal' prison (Faulks, p293).

His dispassionate overview of the outcome of his court case reinforces his abnormality – he is devoid of the emotional responses of guilt, remorse or even concern that are expected from a 'normal' subject. As we saw with Anders Breivik, one public response was that a motivation for diagnosing him as 'mad' was that it would be an aptly defiant social response to his request to be treated as a sane person. Faulks reinforces this notion of the social response to the disordered individual. The reader is positioned in the role of responding to Engleby's nonchalance, in analysing what this says about his character. The reader is expected to interpret whether Engleby's view of the system as flawed and his own position as the correct one can be used as evidence to affirm or deny his sanity.

The character expresses his gratitude to the personality disorder diagnosis that leads to his diminished responsibility plea ultimately being accepted and his subsequent detention in a psychiatric unit. While the novel seems, on the surface, to be outlining a character gleeful to have *gotten away with it* – 'I was an object of concern and care; I was to be scrutinised, medicated, cured – released!' (Faulks, p.299) – it simultaneously questions whether or not madness can actually be feigned to achieve penal leniency. His exclamation of 'released!' here is indistinct and while on one hand it could denote manipulation, it can conversely be read as reflecting Engleby's flawed understanding of the way he is perceived by society. Engleby is represented as markedly at odds with his

culture, but his treatment as a mentally ill person raises questions about the socio-cultural use of “madness” as a tool to control unwanted or abnormal behaviour. Faulks draws attention to the impossibility of arriving at the definitive conclusion demanded by the legal system.

In *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, Shriver explores the ambiguity of the boundary between criminal and patient status by invoking the power carried by the insinuation of mental disorder. Kevin is not accepted as having the diminished criminal responsibility on the grounds of an abnormal mind that we see with Engleby – although his age does impact his sentence, which will be examined below. He is sentenced to seven years imprisonment, beginning his sentence in a juvenile correctional facility. Part of Kevin’s legal defence offered the suggestion that Kevin had been taking Prozac which *could* have had an adverse effect on his mental state. Eva maintains:

Though that defense neither got him off completely nor released him into psychiatric care as intended, Kevin’s sentence may have been slightly more lenient for the doubt his lawyer raised over his chemical stability.¹⁰⁶

While Kevin’s psychiatric defence is not openly accepted in the court, Shriver suggests that a mere allusion to mental abnormality now carries weight enough to have an impact on the outcome of criminal trials. This suggests an anxiety on the part of the judge surrounding the treatment of and approach to mental disorder in a court setting. In invoking this, Shriver notes the destabilisation of the notion of the legal subject through the implication of mental disorder – if an individual is deemed “mad”, the normal legal processes must be altered to account for this. Seemingly, even without a sanctioned

¹⁰⁶ Shriver, Lionel. *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 2006) p.459

diagnosis of mental illness, the circularity implied raises doubts over the appropriate response to criminal deviation.

Engleby is seemingly indifferent to his legal proceedings, providing the reader with no evidence of remorse for the crime committed. The evidence provided in his journal is presented as the uncensored truthful account of an individual's self, but it is also represented here as a subjective account that can be edited cleverly to create a persona. This raises questions about the fabricated and social nature of personality that was discussed in Chapter Two. The parallel drawn here with Faulks' creation of the character reminds the reader that the verisimilitude of detailed fictional accounts can mask their construction and convince the reader – or jury member – of their reality. Furthermore, Engleby is cagily aware of the fact that the account is to be scrutinised for the picture it creates of his mental state:

I thought perhaps I ought to try to homogenise it for art's sake; but then I thought maybe Dr Exley could read something into the changes – some significant psychological development, or lack of (Faulks, p278).

Engleby's awareness of the fact that his comments, writings and behaviour are being interpreted reminds the reader of their own role in the reading process. He thus positions himself as markedly at odds with the rest of his society, and crucially with the reader themselves. This heightens the affective response. Engleby's consolidation of the reader with the rest of the society to which he is at odds forces the reader to consider their own position as an individual – like Engleby – or as one of the collective. This challenging of the reader to “reject” the character serves in fact to heighten his fictional allure – he becomes even more compelling *because* he stands out as being different.

The reading process of analysing the novel for a ‘significant psychological development’ is made explicit, challenging our social approach to the sanity of a deviant individual. In examining this in the context of diminished responsibility, the novel asks the reader to contemplate whether the court – and society as a whole - reacts to the crime or to the representation of an abnormal person.

While Engleby comments on his judicial fate in the manner of a passive observer, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* depicts the eponymous character as playing a more active role in the manipulation of the courts’ perception of his mental abnormality. Eva narrates this exchange:

I commended [Kevin’s lawyer’s] inventive approach to the case. I said I’d never heard of Prozac’s alleged psychotic effect on some patients or I’d never have allowed Kevin to take it.
“Oh, don’t thank me, thank Kevin,” said John easily. “I’d never heard of the psychosis thing either. That whole approach was his idea.”
“But – he wouldn’t have had access to a library, would he?”
“No, not in pretrial detention...I hardly needed to lift a finger, frankly. He knew all the citations. Even the names and locations of expert witnesses” (Shriver, p.459).

The novel to this point has been a retrospective engagement with the nature/nurture debate. It reflects on what, if any, influencing factors in his formative years could have driven Kevin to commit the murders, with emphasis on Eva’s failings as a mother (which will be discussed later in further detail), teasing out the reader’s discomfiting sympathy for the infant Kevin. By including a seemingly conclusive portrayal of Kevin as a cold and calculating murderer, the novel gives the reader cause to consider whether or not their sympathies were misplaced. Kevin’s comprehensive knowledge of the citations and the ways in which the law can be applied suggests an acumen that is

discordant with the notion of a disordered mind, and instead creates an image of meticulous planning and malevolent manipulation. Shriver's depiction of a chillingly intelligent killer who is able to manipulate draws attention both to what incites fear in the public mind and to misconceptions about bona fide madness. By implication, a lack of sanity is recognisable by impaired organisational function or by lower intelligence, because the ability to manipulate the legal system is represented as evidence of mental clarity.

As we saw in Chapter Two, in some cases of personality disorder, a refusal to accept the diagnosis often strengthens the diagnostic criteria, reinforcing that the individual's pervading view differs markedly from the rest of their culture. In both *Engleby* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the question of mental instability as a manipulation of the legal system is contrasted with the protagonist's assertion of their own normalcy. Both Engleby and Kevin claim ownership of their crimes, with no clear expression of remorse. They are represented as dangerous and as a threat to society, not only as a result of their criminal actions, but also because they have manipulated the legal system.

The arbitrary borderline between the definition of a legally accountable adult and a child is another aspect of statute that, according to Eva, Kevin is not only acutely aware of, but able to deliberately and knowingly manipulate for his own benefit. This borderline between adulthood and childhood will be examined further in the following chapter, in relation to Zoe Heller's *Notes on a Scandal*. In her correspondence with Kevin's father, Eva says:

Even you realize that *Thursday* being staged three days before he turned the age of full legal accountability was no coincidence. He may have been virtually sixteen on *Thursday*, but in a statutory sense he was still fifteen, meaning that in New York state a more lenient raft of sentencing guidelines would apply, even if they threw the book at him and tried him as an adult. Kevin is sure to have researched the fact that the law does not, like his father, *round up* (Shriver, pp.458-9).

In highlighting his awareness of this, Eva posits Kevin as having used his legal status as a minor, again, to achieve judicial leniency. This reinforces the atrocity of his criminal acts through the suggestion that Kevin has manipulated the events to take advantage of the ambiguous borderlines of the legal system. Kevin is not only aware of but is able to exploit his own peripheral status. By juxtaposing this with the notion that psychiatric disorder can impact on a straightforward definition of a criminal act, Shriver highlights that the borderline between madness and criminality is as socially constructed and arbitrary as is the difference between a deviant individual aged fifteen and one at sixteen. The novel alludes briefly to a campaign to try Kevin as an adult so he could be given the death penalty (Shriver, p.167). Just as Shriver avoided an explicit critique of American gun culture by writing Kevin's weapon of choice as a crossbow,¹⁰⁷ her fleeting mention of this possible outcome could be interpreted as an acknowledgement and simultaneous deflection of the need to provide a critique of capital punishment in response to what the novel depicts. Nevertheless, its inclusion in the novel as a possible outcome of Kevin's actions, in conjunction with his perceived leniency on the grounds of age and mental state, could suggest that it is precisely the categorising of people based on mitigating circumstances for their crimes that makes border cases such as this one so controversial. By invoking the borderline between the clearly defined categories of adult and child, and between legal madness and sanity, both Shriver and Faulks

¹⁰⁷ BBC World Book Club, (2011). [podcast] Lionel Shriver - We Need To Talk About Kevin. Available at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00kcpt1> [Accessed 24 Apr. 2015].

provoke an examination of the individuals that occupy these symbolic border spaces.

Furthermore, the novels' depictions of these individuals suggest that it is precisely their challenges to these borderlines that draw attention to problematic facets of the hegemonic system.

Kevin refutes the idea that he orchestrated the psychiatric implications of his own defence. In the following exchange between Kevin and the presenter of a documentary who interviews him in prison, the interviewer cites noteworthy academic journals to explore the link that has been created between Kevin's mental stability and his criminal actions. This positions Kevin as exemplifying a contemporary socio-cultural phenomenon – again, the implications of the media representations of this will be examined in the next chapter. Kevin is represented as being able to offer a potential insight into the psychopathic phenomenon acting as an expert witness, in a similar vein to a psychiatrist in a legal setting, on the social problem that he himself poses:

“But according to both the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Lancet*, a causal linkage between Prozac and homicidal psychosis is purely speculative. Do you think more research - ?”

“Hey,” Kevin raised a palm, “I’m no doctor. That defense was my lawyer’s idea, and he was doing his job. I said I felt a little weird” (Shriver, p.412).

The suggestion that Kevin's lawyer was ‘doing his job’ reinforces the attitudes of scepticism towards mental disorder as a legal defence. The role of the lawyer is posited as one that fabricates the causal links in an attempt to deceive the legal system. Kevin goes on, however, to defiantly affirm his act as a conscious and active choice:

“But I’m not looking for an excuse here. I don’t blame some satanic cult or pissy girlfriend or big bad bully who called me a fag. One of the things I can’t stand about this country is lack of *accountability*. Everything Americans do that doesn’t work out too great has to be somebody else’s fault. Me, I stand by what I done. It wasn’t anybody’s idea but mine” (Shriver, p.412).

Kevin poses a direct challenge to the contemporary status quo. In directly attacking American contemporary culture in his ready acceptance of responsibility for his crime, Kevin raises questions about the role of the transgressive individual challenging societal norms through their actions. As we saw with Anders Breivik, one of the most vehemently refused aspects of the case was any similarity that could be drawn between Breivik’s ideologies and those of the general public. Kevin’s ownership of his crime and failure to profess any innocence or cite an excuse or contributing factor underpins that which represents him as a threat. The defiant ownership of what he has done represents an unashamed attack on the social collective and thus a challenge to sociality itself. Society is as accountable in Kevin’s eyes, as he is in the eyes of the group. The threat that society feels the need to defend itself from is both the physical assault on members of the community and the notion that society has yet to acknowledge its own shortcomings in its failure to account for the transgressive individual. In symbolically diminishing the impact of the individual’s attack on the group structures by deeming this individual as external to the realm of the “normal” human subject, society is absolved of its responsibility.

The community in the novel is represented as striving to piece together a narrative that explains Kevin, contextualising him in terms of a dearth of adequate parenting or in terms of chemically induced mental stability. Kevin’s refusal to participate by adopting the expected persona of “mad” person is what truly unnerves. The upholding of his homicidal tendencies as insanity in the social commentary that surrounds him is

revealed to be an attempt to restore calm to the community in depicting Kevin as abnormal and treatable. His own lucidity and highly-functioning mental capacity, as opposed to one that is in any way diminished, denies this. In depicting Kevin as adhering so vehemently to his actions, Shriver forces the reader to not only engage with the question of whether or not he is mad, but with how he can be defined - and legally treated - if he is not.

The Potential for Rehabilitation

Despite the suggestion that a successful diminished responsibility plea is beneficial to the criminal individual, the drawback of the plea is that the individual is deemed “insane” and as such loses their social agency. While the novels probe the social structures that make up the justice system, the threat to social order that has been posed by the deviant characters is neutralised through their incarceration in prison or in a psychiatric setting. They are removed from society. Both novels represent retributive outcomes that claim to have the aim of rehabilitation of the individual – Engleby through treatment, and Kevin through serving a custodial sentence – following their extreme criminal acts. In a clinical context, rehabilitation occurs once treatment has been successful in making a person “better”. Through an interrogation of the possibility of ever knowing the “true” persona of the other – and in fact whether this notion is in itself an artificial construct – the novels question what it means to be “better” or cured for the purposes of rehabilitation.

Engleby examines the possibilities of clinical treatment and “cure” for the personality disordered individual. This is contrasted with the alternative retributive response to mandatory psychiatric care – a prison sentence – which is contested for in the

aforementioned episode of the legal trial. Engleby's eighteen year spell in Longdale incorporates a range of treatments for his personality disorder, with no ostensible therapeutic outcome. When Engleby is taken on a supervised visit to the local village he is depicted as having become institutionalised – the world has developed at a speed that he struggles to cope with. He is dependent on his nurses, and is represented in a manner that emphasises his powerlessness and evokes sympathy. He is depicted in a way that is entirely devoid of the suggestion that he poses any threat to society:

To begin with, I was alarmed by the cars and the people. I held tight to Tony's arm. He talked to me in a soothing way, 'Don't worry, Mike. We'll make sure you come to no harm. Steady now' (Faulks, p.335).

Engleby now struggles to cope in a society he seemingly no longer poses a threat to. After being removed from contact with the public for so long, his alarm at the everyday movements of the rest of society represents a total break between him and the rest of the world. Treatment has seemingly had the effect of rendering him an individual in need of care, which better adheres to the socio-cultural image of a 'sick' person. He concludes the visit with a request to return to the hospital, saying, 'eventually, I couldn't stand it any more and I said, 'Do you mind if we go back?'' (Faulks p.336). Engleby has been removed from society, both physically in the form of being detained in a psychiatric unit and symbolically in him being reduced to a powerless and dependant being. The novel's representation of victim characteristics in the protagonist draws attention to and questions the difference between the outcomes of an individual being assigned criminal or patient status.

After Engleby's status shifts from criminal to patient, the novel's focus is shifted to the purpose of the treatment. Eighteen years of incarceration in a prison or in a psychiatric setting would plausibly have the similar outcomes of an individual being so

institutionalised that they struggle to integrate with the rest of the world. However, in the case of an individual with a personality disorder that already impacts their ability to integrate with the rest of society, the perceived outcome of treatment is called into question. Rather than treating the person for their disorder, institutionalisation of the individual reconfigures them as that which can be recognised and understood by society as a benign and non-threatening individual. Faulks questions the purpose of treating a personality disordered individual. It is unclear whether treatment has made a difference at all. Engleby was unable to integrate with the rest of the world prior to the crime he committed and his institutionalisation, while seemingly reducing him to a benign figure, in fact represents no discernible impact on his personality disorder. Treatment seems to serve a social, as opposed to patient-led, purpose.

The novel's ending explores the suggestion that, for the personality disordered individual, the outcome of the legal trial is irrelevant as the behaviours are entrenched. As the individual's personality is what is disordered, the disorder remains regardless of whether the individual is in a prison, a clinical setting or is at large in society. The individual's stay in the mental institution is revealed to serve a social role. The removal of the individual from interaction with the public benefits the harmonious continuation of the rest of society – there is no longer a challenge posed to the boundaries of what can be deemed normal. This will be examined in more detail in the context of René Girard's scapegoat theory in the next chapter. Faulks raises alarming images about the role of compulsory detention through the novel, and in fact augments how alarming these images are through Engleby's seeming indifference to the outcome.

The possibilities for the future represented by Shriver's ambiguous culmination of *We Need To Talk About Kevin* also explore the notions of social rehabilitation as measured through the expression of socially expected responses. The novel raises questions about the role of the deviant individual in society after they have served their sentence. It allows for multiple interpretations and perceptions, further refuting the notion of irrevocable categories and ultimate definitions of human subjects:

When I hugged him good-bye, he clung to me childishly, as he never had in childhood proper. I'm not quite sure since he muttered it into the upturned collar of my coat, but I like to think that he choked, "*I'm sorry*" (Shriver, p.465).

Kevin's clinging embrace implies that an emotional or psychological transformation has taken place. Despite Kevin's sanity being asserted by the court through the refusal of his psychiatric defence, Kevin's detention seems to have had the same effect as that represented in *Engleby*. The threat Kevin once posed is neutralised and his punishment is represented as having served its purpose - he is represented as a benign being and a childlike victim who cries on his mother's shoulder. In contrast with *Engleby*'s blankness of expected emotive response, however, Kevin seemingly expresses fear and remorse, suggesting a potential future for the mother-son relationship. As with the entirety of the novel, Eva's narrative destabilises this; 'I'm not quite sure' and 'I like to think' reinforcing the social and personal expectations that dominate their relationship as well as the impossibility of truly knowing the other.

The reader is unnerved by the incongruity of a happy ending to a novel with such a dark subject matter. The novel's ostensibly optimistic conclusion posits Kevin's rehabilitation as a longer-term possibility, which is an aspect of contemporary culture that demands attention. Anders Breivik will be in his early fifties when his twenty-one

year prison sentence ends – his possibilities for integration back into society seem unfathomable.

The novel's resolute final note draws attention to Eva's therapeutic progress and to the possibilities for Kevin's life following his release. In concluding a novel about the life of a high school shooter with a note on the possibilities for his future, Shriver borders on the darkly comic in her challenge to the discourses that explore the rehabilitation possibilities for psychopathic ex-offenders. The novel has also been centred upon a retrospective quest for knowledge and culpability and through her ending Shriver also reinforces the complexity and futility of seeking definition and categorisation of the human subject. Eva projects her view of the future for herself and her son:

He has five grim years left to serve in an adult penitentiary, and I cannot vouch for what will walk out the other side. But in the meantime, there is a second bedroom in my serviceable apartment. The bedspread is plain. A copy of *Robin Hood* lies on the bookshelf. And the sheets are clean (Shriver, p.468).

As will be examined below, in twentieth-century child development discourses, the mother-child relationship is held to be at fault for psychopathic tendencies, and is prioritised above all factors in the establishing of blame. The new beginning implied by the clean sheets consigns Kevin's social role to the domestic space, and implies a future for the mother-son relationship that is at odds with the representation of their relationship to this point. While the mother-son relationship may be reparable, Kevin's role in society is surely not. The novel's final paragraph makes a strong point. The perceived remorse expressed by Kevin makes his reintegration into what remains of the family unit possible. The symbolic 'clean sheet' however, is impossible outside of this extremely dysfunctional family unit – Kevin's re-integration into the wider social group is incomprehensible. The re-establishing of the mother-son relationship serves as a

final note that undermines the preservation of the child development theories and draws attention to the excessive weight attributed to the mother's role.

"Mainstream" adult prison is represented in both *Engleby* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* as a horrific prospect for both of the anti-heroes, reinforcing the suggestion that they were motivated to manipulate their criminal penalties. Engleby contrasts the two settings: 'a semi-civilised hospital with 'medication', therapy and craft rooms – rather than a Category A, round-the-clock fisting' (Faulks, p.295), while Kevin is described as physically trembling as Eva questions how he feels prior to the transfer from juvenile detention to adult prison heralded by his becoming eighteen:

"Nervous?" he asked incredulously. "Nervous! Do you know *anything* about those places?" He shook his head in dismay (Shriver, p.462).

Kevin's rhetorical question draws attention to the representation of prison settings as an area of our society that is culturally relatively underrepresented. While television programmes that depict prison settings have enjoyed some popularity in recent years (*Prison Break*, *Orange is the New Black*), they are in the minority in comparison to the wide contemporary coverage of and fascination with criminality and justice. This is depicted from the perspective of both the criminal (*Dexter*, *Breaking Bad*) and from the perspective of the various organisations that ensure that deviant individuals are apprehended and that social justice is served (*Criminal Minds*, *CSI*, *Law and Order*, among a vast list of other examples). Kevin's question serves to address the reader as well as his mother – highlighting that while we are fascinated with the process of ensuring that criminality is appropriately punished, we don't, in fact, 'know anything about those places'. Both prisons and psychiatric hospitals serve as spaces that ensure

the transgressive individual is physically and symbolically obscured from society's view.

The reader's interpretive role is never rewarded with a clear answer or solution to the problems posed by the deviant individuals. Instead the novels' ambiguous and open conclusions highlight the impossibility of truly knowing whether the judgements made on the other's mental state are accurate. Similarly, the challenge of measuring whether a person can be cured, treated or rehabilitated following a period of incarceration in a psychiatric or prison setting is highlighted through the authors' refusal to lead their readers in one way or another.

Kevin is depicted in terms of his otherness, both in his relationship with his mother, and in the way he is perceived by the rest of society. His role as the subject of the TV documentary highlights that he is a source of fascination for the society that is invoked in the references to the documentary's audience. This echoes the reader's fascination with, and the attempt to comprehend or decode, this enigmatic character. Shriver draws attention to this process of seeking definition by refusing to provide one – Kevin claims to be unable to explain why he committed the crimes, replying when asked to explain why he committed the killings that he doesn't know in the manner of a chastised schoolboy hanging his head in shame. Eva narrates:

I'd harboured no preconception of what answer I wanted. I certainly had no interest in an explanation that reduced the ineffable enormity of what he had done to a pat sociological aphorism about "alienation" out of *Time* magazine or a cheap psychological construct like "attachment disorder" [...] For Kevin, progress was deconstruction. He would only begin to plumb his own depths by first finding himself unfathomable (Shriver, p.464).

Shriver draws attention to the cultural expectation – or lack thereof – of what a reformed or rehabilitated offender looks like. Eva’s rejection of clinical labels echoes the cultural scepticism towards such phenomenological terminologies, but does so in a discomfoting way. Shriver’s employment of a narrator with a scathing tone and with whom the reader finds it difficult to form a literary “attachment” in fact draws attention to the expectations of the reader. By thwarting these literary expectations through Eva’s continual undermining of her own narrative claims, Shriver demands a further response from the reader with regard to their assessment of the impact of Eva’s parenting on Kevin and what claims its representation makes about contemporary society.

Shriver examines the impact of physical illness on personality, and in doing so raises questions about the notion of a “natural” persona. Eva describes an episode of childhood illness during which Kevin’s difficult mannerisms disappear as his fever rises, and are replaced with markedly different behaviours. Alongside the physical weakness and inability to leave his bed, Eva notes, he expresses his preferences and asks for things politely, in contrast to his usual daily behaviour. In sickness, Kevin seems to become a “normal” boy. Eva interprets this difference as being revelatory of Kevin’s “true” state, in comparison to his fabricated every day persona:

I know that we all transform one way or another when we’re ill, but Kevin wasn’t cranky or tired, he was a completely different person. And that’s how I achieved an appreciation for how much energy and commitment it must have taken him the rest of the time to generate the other boy (or boys) (Shriver, pp279-280).

Through this configuration of sickness revealing the true self, Shriver reinforces the artifice of personality – Eva perceives Kevin’s inability to maintain his ‘other’ persona(e) as resulting from a lack of physical energy, equating bodily health with the ability to adopt the manufactured mannerisms projected to others in everyday life. Consequently, the implication is that Eva regards Kevin’s criminal acts as an active choice made in health, refuting the notion of them being triggered by illness or disorder. Ultimately, this view disregards any cultural notion of Kevin being either mentally abnormal or as being fundamentally evil. His actions are the product of a normal individual who chooses to adopt a particular persona.

Shriver draws attention to the social values placed on sickness and health by inverting the linguistic meanings of the vocabulary surrounding wellness.

Kevin’s physical recovery heralds his return to his adopted persona. Eva says: ‘I told myself I should be pleased; he was better. *Better?* Well, not to me (Shriver, p282).’ The duality of the meaning of Eva’s admission challenges the reader’s interpretive role – her lament for Kevin’s infirmity is ambiguous and simultaneously reinforces the view of her as a mother struggling to connect with her son, and conversely implies a preference for Kevin in a frail and powerless state, the notion of which is disquieting to the reader and suggestive of the potential for a pathological label.¹⁰⁸ The narrative focus shifts to examine both the “natural” and fabricated states of the antagonist of the crime and the reader’s emotive reception of the reaction of a mother in response to her child’s recovery from illness.

Parental Negligence

We Need to Talk About Kevin contrasts two types of legal trial. There is no doubt over whether Kevin committed his crime, and therefore the purpose of his case is to focus on the appropriate legal response to his crime, taking into account his age and mental state. Throughout the novel, however, Eva also simultaneously narrates her own civil trial. She is sued by a parent of one of Kevin's victims, with the aim of determining whether she, as a mother, can be held responsible for Kevin's actions by being deemed a negligent parent. The novel fictionalises the experience of the Harris and Klebold families, who were sued for parental negligence when their respective sons carried out the Columbine bombings and shootings in 1999, the same year in which *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is set. The lawyer acting on behalf of the Shoels family whose son was one of the victims of Columbine outlines the rationale behind holding a parent responsible for their child's violent act, stating that: "Responsibility for violence sometimes extends beyond the person who actually pulls the trigger [...] It sometimes extends to those who contribute to individual acts of violence."¹⁰⁹

In comparison to the frequent and detailed descriptions of her own civil process, Eva describes her memory of Kevin's trial as 'a blank'. Shriver's employment of Eva's cold narrative style situates the reader in an active judging role regarding Eva's parenting, as opposed to the role of a passive observer, as the reader is in relation to Kevin's crime. There is no need to ascertain whether or not Kevin is guilty for his crimes, only what should be done about it. Eva's guilt as a parent, and the implications this has for the representation of women and the role of the mother in contemporary society, is what is at stake here. Nevertheless, the two cases do share a common aim –

¹⁰⁹ 'Columbine lawsuit may go beyond shooters' parents', 27 May 1999, CNN.com
<<http://edition.cnn.com/US/9905/27/columbine.lawsuit.04/>> [Accessed 24th April 2015]

the attribution of responsibility to complex internal processes. The reader is situated in the role of juror, responsible for determining whether Eva is “guilty” of negligent parenting, and similarly whether there are psychological rationales that can contextualise Kevin’s acts. Shriver’s ironic parallel highlights how vastly different the meaning of “guilty” is in the two cases. Through Shriver’s examination of the creation and prioritisation of norms the reader is also required to consider society’s treatment of deviation from these norms as criminal “otherness”.

The trials depict and satirise the culture of litigation that is so prevalent in Western contemporary culture. The precarious nature of the link drawn between Eva’s parental negligence and Kevin’s criminal responsibility places specific focus on the concept that Eva may be entering into some kind of parental charade. She is accused of constructing a parental image that is a fallacy – in that her affections for the child were false, and that she did not feel what a normal mother should, drawing attention to the groundless concept of “normal”. The civil trial seeks to establish whether this level of parenting can be deemed criminally negligent and legally responsible for Kevin’s crimes. Through Kevin’s actions and society’s subsequent reactions, Eva’s “normality” as a mother comes under legal scrutiny.

The primary quest of Eva’s narrative is a self-justification of her own parental efficacy. She refers to the therapeutic benefits of her narrative:

I have come full circle, making a journey much like Kevin’s own. In asking petulantly whether *Thursday* was my fault, I have had to go backward, to deconstruct (Shriver, p.467).

Eva questions throughout the novel how much she loves, and indeed likes, Kevin, interrogating the notion of “natural” maternal instinct and the extent to which this can

be measured. She is accused during her trial of ‘visiting my son so dutifully in detention during his own trial only because I anticipated being sued for parental negligence. I was acting a part, he claimed, going through the motions’ (Shriver, p.46). Implicitly, the prosecution states that a woman has a responsibility, not only to appear a “good” mother, but to *be* one in a genuine way. It is the authenticity of Eva’s parental concerns that are under civil scrutiny.

Eva discusses the defensive approach taken by her solicitor. She mirrors the image of Kevin’s manipulation by feigned or Prozac-induced mental instability by representing her own lawyer as deftly creating an image to attain favourable legal outcomes:

Our case – his case, really – was perched around the proposition that I had been a normal mother with normal maternal affections who had taken normal precautions to ensure she raised a normal child. Whether we were the victims of bad luck or bad genes or bad culture was a matter for shamans or biologists or anthropologists to divine, but not the courts. Harvey was intent on evoking every parent’s latent fear that it was possible to do absolutely everything right and still turn on the news to a nightmare from which there is no waking (Shriver, p.174).

Harvey’s creation of a highly emotive story operates as a further metafictional technique. His evoking of latent fears through the verbal account he provides points the reader to the social discourses that operate to create images of normal and abnormal parents and children. The repeated suggestion of parental normalcy echoes the incongruity raised by the earlier examination of a disordered or abnormal personality in contrast with a normal one. Although the defence is successful in a legal sense, the approach required to prove Eva’s innocence draws attention to the social discourses that reinforce maternal norms. In invoking the notion of ‘every parent’, Shriver questions what a normal parent is, how this could be measured, and what the consequences of

“abnormal” parenting would be, if it were proven. Furthermore, in proposing the notion that parental efficacy can be linked to an offspring’s criminal responsibility, the novel implies a never-ending deferral of blame, back through the generations.

In an article that starts by depicting a scene of over 120 people gathered together in response to the crime, the *New York Times* depicts Michael Shoels, the father of the aforementioned Columbine victim, acting as public speaker in an attempt to mobilise - with mob connotations explicit in the article’s depiction - the crowd into some kind of social response to the crime:

“They ask us if we blame the parents?” he thunders. “Who else do we blame? I taught my son right from wrong. My son wasn’t shooting people up. My son was in the library doing what he was supposed to do.”¹¹⁰

In the Columbine case, with both perpetrators killed and thus no longer physically present to be answerable for their actions, we see their parents serving as the answer to the question ‘Who else do we blame’? As we will see in the following chapter, following a crime that serves as an attack on the social group, a scapegoat is chosen as the focal point upon which the collective can converge, unifying once more in the process of attributing blame and subsequently expelling that individual.

We Need to Talk About Kevin engages with, satirises and challenges the discourses on motherhood and child development that dominated the second half of the twentieth century. In *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, his 1951 monograph on the mental health of homeless children, commissioned by the World Health Organisation, John

¹¹⁰ Belkin, Lisa, ‘Parents blaming parents’, 31 Oct 1999, New York Times
< <http://www.nytimes.com/1999/10/31/magazine/parents-blaming-parents.html?n=Top/Reference/Times%20Topics/People/K/Klebold,%20Dylan&scp=4&sq=belkin%20klebold&st=cse> > [Accessed 24th April 2015]

Bowlby collated more than fifteen years' research establishing a link between the impact of the maternal relationship on the development of mental health in childhood and beyond. He stressed:

It is this complex, rich, and rewarding relationship with the mother in the early years, varied in countless ways by relations with the father and with siblings, that child psychiatrists and many others now believe to underlie the development of character and mental health.¹¹¹

The report establishes a causal link between frequent or prolonged separations from the mother and 'grave personality disturbances commonly called psychopathic' (Bowlby, p26), attributing the separations as a primary reason for psychopathy in later life.

Bowlby's report was pivotal to concepts of child development and parenting in the second half of the twentieth-century and although updated to encompass developments, continued to be viewed as a fundamental theory. In 1972 Michael Rutter published *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*, with a second edition following in 1981. Rutter's update shifts, among other revisions, focus from a physical separation of mother and child as engendering behavioural problems to the less tangible ability to form *connections*. 'Affectionless psychopathy was due *not* to the breaking of relationships but rather the failure to form bonds.'¹¹²

Just as Faulks explicitly cites the terminologies of the DSM in his discussion of personality disorder in *Engleby*, *We Need to Talk About Kevin* unambiguously explores the theory of attachment and the consequences of a lack of attachment as its central theme. Rutter outlines the six characteristics 'necessary for adequate mothering: a loving relationship, which leads to attachment, which is unbroken, which provides adequate stimulation, in which the mothering is provided by one person and which

¹¹¹ Bowlby, John, *Maternal Care and Mental Health*, (Geneva : World Health Organization 1951), p11

¹¹² Rutter, Michael, *Maternal Deprivation Reassessed*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981) p.131

occurs in the child's own family' (Rutter, p.18). Shriver parodies this; in his early years we see Kevin go through several different childminders to facilitate both his parents working. Eva's spiky first-person narration serves to highlight her detachment from her role as a mother and her experience of Kevin's development is recounted through teachers' reports and conversations with childminders. If we adhere to the attachment paradigm proposed we can identify in the episodes that depict the infant Kevin the short term effects of 'maternal deprivation,' moving through the periods of 'protest' in which he continually cries, and 'despair' in which he is apathetic and listless.

Eva is a reluctant mother from Kevin's conception, with the pregnancy being planned more due to a desire for developing her own story than a desire for motherhood: 'At least if I got pregnant, something would *happen*...I like the idea of turning the page is all' (Shriver, p19). Shriver's allusion to the turning of pages reminds the reader of the fictionality of the novel and simultaneously draws attention to the central significance of pregnancy and motherhood in a contemporary woman's 'life story'. As Wingfield puts it:

What becomes apparent with Kevin is that the pressure on his mother to conform to a mythical stereotype of a Good Mother, sole primary caregiver to her child, makes it impossible for her to seek or receive support from the wider community when she realises she cannot live up to the expectations placed on her. This also means that her husband is unable to accept her 'unnatural' and therefore somehow 'monstrous' inability to bond with her own son.¹¹³

Augmenting the notion of Eva's failures to fulfil her role as a mother is Eva's retrospective reflection during which she perceives any stunting of Kevin's development as deliberate and as almost calculated on Kevin's part, raising questions about Eva's own pathological paranoid perceptions of monstrosity in her infant child.

¹¹³ Wingfield, Rachel. 'We need to talk about... attachment and crime.' *Attachment: New Directions in Psychotherapy and Relational Psychoanalysis* 1:1 (2007), 78-85. (p.80)

This undermines her account and unnerves the reader, who becomes aware that accounts of child development are entirely subjective and cannot necessarily be taken at face value.

In *Mad, Bad and Sad* Lisa Appignanesi suggests that post-war psychologists were motivated to encourage the mother back into the home (Appignanesi p.307). In addition to Bowlby's research linking separation from the mother in formative years to a criminal tendency, Edward Strecker had attributed the number of Americans being rejected for military service to inadequate mothering and over-attachment (Appignanesi, p.306) and Bruno Bettelheim held the 'refrigerator' mother responsible for schizophrenia and autism (Appignanesi, p.310). The novel represents the convergence of the discourses of the mental health movement and the women's movement that had been developing throughout the twentieth century. In many ways Eva is a feminist heroine. She is a successful businesswoman and founder of a travel writing company, earning a larger income than her husband in a subversion of stereotypical gender roles. Despite some initial resistance from Franklin, Eva's affluence facilitates an early return to work, with Kevin cared for by childminders.

Eva leaving Kevin in his formative years to travel to Africa for four months is a key episode in the novel. Eva adopts the terminology of child development, admitting to Kevin: "I couldn't have expected that simply *forming an attachment to you*," I phrased as diplomatically as I knew how, "would be so much work" (Shriver, p.68). Shriver emphasises the carefulness with which Eva uses the vernacular of psychology through the use of italics. Eva is scathing of the contemporary tendency to pathologise and sees no value in terminologies, 'lavish[ing] a laden irony on trendy American buzz phrases' (Shriver, p.362). As we saw with Engleby's scornful view of his own diagnosis, Eva's rejection of psychopathologies serves to simultaneously challenge the

contemporary labelling and categorising of the human subject, and also to draw attention to Eva's lack of awareness of her own pathological traits. Eva's tendency to comment on her own narrative tone imposes a self-reflexivity to the novel as a whole. Eva's reference to being 'bewildered why a standardized psychiatric label like *postnatal depression* was supposed to be consoling' (Shriver, p.100) draws attention to our own scrutinising of potential 'symptoms' in her and in Kevin, both in medical and in literary terms.

In blaming the mother for the psychopath we remove the psychopath's agency by shifting the blame to maternal failures. Shriver examines this through the legal quest to ascertain Eva's parental normality. In creating this conclusive narrative society is provided with an explanation for, and therefore a means of understanding, the horrific event. This removes the psychopath's danger in that he is no longer a threatening unknown but can now be described as an entity that there is a social process for. The perpetrator is described in terms of the damage done by this failure, and thus reconfigured as psychologically broken and abnormal. The offspring of an abnormal mother is understood as the product of a failure of femininity. Throughout his childhood, Kevin's victim characteristics have been emphasised, alongside Eva's flaws – not only as a mother or a woman, but as an amiable individual and narrator. Sympathy for Kevin can only ever be evoked through a shifting of blame and a focus on Eva's failures. The complex narrative layers created by Shriver, however, challenge the reader's interpretive judgements, and draw attention to the way in which the mother is scapegoated.

We reject the notions of the “bad” mother espoused by the child development theories of the twentieth century as anti-feminist. However, we also reject the notion of the “bad” child through Shriver’s fictionalisation of the formative years of a mass murderer. Vivienne Muller examines the ways in which Eva’s narrative not only challenges the societal pressures on her to epitomise “normal” parenting, but also the ways in which this is applied to the child:

In short Kevin confounds those categorizations of the child and by extension the good child that are the foundational texts for parental and specifically motherly modes of comprehending and relating to children and their stages of development. By the standards that formulate the good child, Kevin is abject, but the abject, as Kristeva reminds us is that which does not respect borders, positions, rules (1982, 4), and in so doing can also bring some illumination to bear on those things and those contexts that make it so. In this respect, Eva, as she has for her self-reflexive analysis of her maternal experience, builds into her litany of Kevin’s abnormal behaviour, her own critiques of the social borders, positions and rules that make Kevin the bad child.¹¹⁴

The binary opposition that has been established – the root of the problem explained by either the child or the mother being “bad” – is exposed and destabilised. What remains is a fundamental uncertainty about any possible explanation that can be provided for the events. This in turn exposes the need in contemporary society to piece together an explanatory narrative. In putting forward the ‘Need to Talk About Kevin,’ Shriver highlights the shift in social discourse necessitated by a rejection of the existing model, and suggests that the claims to truth offered by all parties must be viewed with mistrust. ‘Kevin’ is a stand-in for all of the unhappy aspects of society and signifies an examination of the ways in which the group deals with them.

¹¹⁴ Muller, Vivienne ‘Good and bad mothering: Lionel Shriver’s ‘We Need to Talk About Kevin’. In: Porter, Marie and Kelso, Julie, (eds.) *Theorising and Representing Maternal Realities*. (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) p50

If Kevin's actions are *not* the result of grossly inadequate parenting - as the civil trial finds - or, as the criminal defence suggests, a result of a chemical imbalance, we are still left with the unanswered question that is posed by Kevin's horrific rejection of legal and socio-cultural parameters. The novel ostensibly forces the reader to question: *What is Kevin?* However, although appropriated through the skewed perspective of his equally ambiguous and "abnormal" mother, the reader is given an account of Kevin that roots him firmly within his own human subjectivity. Any other justification – Kevin from his own perspective, for example – would be unintelligible in its extreme difference to the social norm. Kevin's actions redefine his entire identity in a way that stretches his ability to be understood in the context of the social.

The discourses that describe Kevin in terms of something recognisable categorise him as psychopathic, and contextualise him in the now well-worn tradition of the high-school shooter. Engleby is configured in a similar way through his psychopathological definition as disordered, abnormal and having diminished responsibility. Both characters are positioned on the borders of the spectrum of humanity. We are reminded of Anders Breivik's rejection of his definition as a madman on the grounds that it undermines his political statement when Kevin claims that his actions were a direct challenge to the inauthenticity of contemporary reality (which will be further examined in Chapter Five). Similarly, Engleby's ambivalence towards his categorisation as either criminal or patient as a result of the court case highlight that – as long as the individual is physically removed from society - the purpose of the trial's outcome is, in many ways, viewed as irrelevant. Both Faulks' and Shriver's drawing attention to the constructed and unreliable nature of all appraisals of the other implicitly demands a re-examination of the problematic structures and social discourses that categorise the deviant individual.

Chapter Four: School for Scapegoating

There must be some people who behave in the wrong way; they act as scapegoats and objects of interest for the normal ones. Think how grateful you are for detective novels and newspapers so that you can say 'Thank heaven I am not the fellow who has committed the crime, I am a perfectly innocent creature' – Jung.¹¹⁵

At first glance, Zoe Heller's *Notes on a Scandal* may seem an incongruous choice for examination, when the "criminal act" at the centre of the novel is compared with the crimes depicted in *Engleby* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin*. The severity of the impact of the crimes - on the communities, societies and cultures represented - differs greatly, with one novel discussing an illicit sexual romp and the others discussing murder and massacre. However, the novels have in common what they reveal about the ways in which the criminal acts and deviant individuals are represented as part of society. Furthermore, they all draw attention to the discursive production and reinforcement of socio-cultural norms and abnormalities. The novels allow us to examine the transgressive acts in their social contexts and also allow us to examine contemporary society's response to deviance. Comparing the novels in this way allows for an exploration of the twenty-first century narrative processes that surround transgressive acts, with emphasis placed on structure (the scapegoating of the offending individual, as we will see) as opposed to content (the "severity" of the crimes that the novels depict).

The central theme of *Notes on a Scandal* is an examination of the severity of a crime committed on a legal borderline and whether this has an impact on its treatment by society. The novel tells the story of an affair conducted by Sheba Hart, a married teacher and Steven Connolly, her fifteen year old pupil. The novel is narrated by Sheba's colleague Barbara Covett, who, through her construction of the re-telling of

¹¹⁵ Jung, *Analytical Psychology* (Routledge, 2014), p80

events, raises questions about the nature of legal and moral transgressions and the social identification of victims. Following Barbara's disclosure of it to a colleague, the affair is publically revealed, is subject to a legal investigation and also becomes the subject matter of the tabloid media. As a result of Connolly being fifteen at the time the sexual relationship began, Sheba is charged with indecent assault. The sexual relationship is a consensual one, but it is its position on the borderline of youth and adulthood that constitutes the crime. Furthermore, Sheba admits to maternal as well as romantic affections for Connolly, obfuscating the difference between a maternal and a sexual relationship. As we will see, these challenges to the boundaries between categories – adult and child, teacher and pupil, public and private – are fundamental to ascertaining the extent of the impact of this representation.

While the media, the law and the school all seemingly uphold legality as a binary thing – an act is either legal or illegal – they are depicted in the novel as doing so uncertainly. The head teacher investigates Barbara's role as a potential accomplice to the crime – which in itself is revelatory of the chasm between the official and unofficial representations of the events, raising baffling and suggestive questions of how a person could be an accomplice to a private, consensual sexual act between two people. The head teacher's statement of fact represents the uncertainty about the gravity of the required social response, through Heller's use of punctuation changing his tone to a questioning one: ““You are aware, of course, that Sheba's conduct with this boy is a criminal offence? A very serious one?””¹¹⁶ The institution's representative both reinforces the fact a crime has been committed and simultaneously undercuts its severity by raising questions about degrees of criminality. He draws attention to the official and social responses and the difference between them. The head teacher's

¹¹⁶ Heller, Zoe. *Notes on a Scandal* (London: Penguin, 2004) p.231

response to the crime highlights that while the legal system establishes a binary into which acts must fit – criminal or non criminal – there are a wealth of nuances that are taken into account when establishing the way in which the act is interpreted by society. I will go on to explore the gender implications of this later in the chapter in relation to the societal reception of the crime, arguing that this uncertainty stems, not only from the age difference between Sheba and Connolly, but from the fact that she is female and he is male.

In his seminal anthropological theory, René Girard offers a method of reading literary texts and representations of contemporary reality in a way that allows us to identify the group working in the interest of the norms and conventions that ensure its continuation. By examining Heller's novel in light of this theory, we can begin to reframe Sheba in the role of social scapegoat, whose treatment as an individual – and ultimate expulsion from society - simultaneously serves these group interests. This reading has implications for the other novels examined in this thesis and allows the reader to further examine and interrogate the subtle and often concealed aspects of the way in which we understand the “mad” or deviant individual in contemporary reality.

The Scapegoat Mechanism

Girard's scapegoat hypothesis evolves from his theory of mimetic violence, as outlined in *Deceit, Desire and the Novel* (1961). The theory presupposes that our desires or drives are not arbitrary or based purely on acquiring objects, but are instead modelled on the desires of a mediator or a third party that we imitate.¹¹⁷ It is the objects possessed or desired by the mediator that we are motivated to desire, and therefore

¹¹⁷ Girard, René (1961), *Deceit desire and the novel: self and other in literary structure*. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1966) p.2

acquisition is only made possible by imitating or “becoming” the mediator. In demonstrating such strong desire, we thus inspire the mediator to increase their own desire and so are in direct competition with the other (Girard, pp.10-11). Girard argues that this mimetic desire inspires violence, and that interactions between people are fundamentally antagonistic. As the focus of desire is shifted from the acquisition of the object to triumph over the other, this violence increases in intensity and threatens to destroy co-existence in communities or groups.

In order for human social harmony to be possible - ensuring that the aforementioned threat of violence does not continue to escalate - the ever-present potential for antagonism must be neutralised. It is at this point, according to Girard, that a process comes into play that enables this continuation of the social. Girard developed the notion of the scapegoat mechanism to explain this process. According to Girard, the scapegoat mechanism functions as a remedy to this violent threat - an individual is selected to be blamed for the social chaos, and ultimately to be sacrificially or ritualistically expelled from the group (Girard, *The Scapegoat*, (1986). This expulsion is what makes them a scapegoat. With their expulsion, the perceived cause of the mounting risk of violence is erased, and the scapegoating process therefore functions to diffuse the mounting violence and ensure the coherence of the community.¹¹⁸

The group has worked together to expel the individual who embodies the unwanted behaviours or trends. The group dynamic is reinforced, at the expense of the individual, whose unwanted behaviour is used as a point of contrast, defining the norms of the group against the abnormalities that they have pushed out. Girard describes the scapegoat effect as:

¹¹⁸ Girard, René (1986) , *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1989) , p15

that strange process through which two or more people are reconciled at the expense of a third party who appears guilty or responsible for whatever ails, disturbs or frightens the scapegoaters. They feel relieved of their tensions and they coalesce into a more harmonious group.¹¹⁹

It is literature, according to Girard, that provides the best examples of examining the mimetic nature of desire and phenomena like the scapegoat mechanism in action.

Girard exemplifies his theories through literary examples that range from Biblical and mythological tales through to literary fiction of the twentieth century:

[This theory's] elaboration was literary in the sense that, to my knowledge at least, the only texts that ever discovered mimetic desire and explored some of its consequences are literary texts. I am speaking here not of all literary texts, not of literature per se, but of a relatively small group of works. In these works, human relations conform to the complex process of strategies and conflicts, misunderstandings and delusions that stem from the mimetic nature of human desire.¹²⁰

Literary texts, therefore, being concerned as the four novels examined in this thesis are, with the intricacies of human relations, desires and conflicts, allow an exploration of the ways in which individuals co-operate. We can also examine the social dynamic that is at play. As well as providing their own textual representations of the human subject in contemporary society, the novels represent the communicative strategies of the modern social group. By depicting the contemporary legal and psychiatric systems these novels allow an examination of the ways in which both laws and conventions are conveyed and reinforced. By investigating these representations of contemporary realism we are able to consider the ways in which, socioculturally, the deviant individual is dealt with symbolically and discursively within the context of the group. Novelistic depictions of the media - as we will see later in this chapter - allow the reader to engage with and examine the ways in which society is explored from a perspective that is situated

¹¹⁹ Williams, James, G (ed), *The Girard reader* (New York : Crossroad, 1996) p.12

¹²⁰ Girard, René , *"To Double Business Bound" essays on literature, mimesis, and anthropology* ; (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) p.vii

outside of the mediatised representation of contemporary reality. Representing events that are mainstays of modern media stories through a self-conscious fictional form, the novels examined in this thesis allow the reader to examine some of the current mechanisms that function by stigmatizing and symbolically excluding individuals labelled “abnormal”, “mad” or “criminal”.

Girard identifies a number of factors that allow us to identify a literary representation of scapegoating at work (*The Scapegoat*, p.24). Firstly, there is a theme of chaos or disorder. Secondly, a crime is committed that an individual is held responsible for. Thirdly, we can usually recognise victim characteristics in that individual – vulnerability, perhaps, or the occupation of a marginal position in society. Fourthly, in response to their crime, we witness the culprit’s expulsion from the community, resulting, finally, in order being restored. According to Girard the representation of the scapegoat mechanism in literary texts can be identified through recognition of these aspects, which he terms the ‘stereotypes of persecution’ (*The Scapegoat*, p.22):

1. A social and cultural crisis characterised by a generalised loss of differences, for example, the collapse of hierarchy.
2. The execution of crimes that can be said to eliminate differences.
3. A perpetrator in whom victim characteristics can be identified.
4. A violent expulsion of the perpetrator from society which subsequently results in social order being restored.

If these stereotypes can be said to be present in a novel or work of literary fiction, according to Girard, this indicates that we are dealing with a representation of the scapegoat mechanism at work, allowing us to examine and explore the implications of this revelation on society (*The Scapegoat*, p.24).

The fourth of Girard’s stereotypes of persecution – the violent expulsion of the perpetrator from society and the subsequent restoration of social order – offers a

succinct overview of the function of the scapegoat mechanism in action. In *Notes on a Scandal* the social consequences of Sheba's affair with Connolly are her expulsion from her enviable position as a white, middle-class wife, mother and teacher, and the epitome of femininity. She is forced to leave the family home and loses her social standing through dismissal from her role of teacher and from her role of mother, with the condition that she can only see her children under supervised conditions. The symbolic violence that the expulsion contains will be examined later, in terms of the gendered aspects of her representation. As we will see, Sheba is stripped of everything that denotes what woman should be in contemporary society at the same time as having the impact - and thus the power - of her deviance diminished on the grounds that she is a woman. The novel's scope does not extend to the legal consequences of Sheba's actions, but hints at the probable incarceration that will result from the transgression.

‘I'm the Most Hated Woman in Britain! There's every chance I'm going to end up in prison! I can say whatever I want!’ She was staggering around the room now like a crazy person (Heller, p237).

The reduction of Sheba to a hysterical, staggering image of madness is significant. Rather than representing the true consequences of her misdemeanour solely as her physical imprisonment it demonstrates her symbolic social expulsion – her social demotion is portrayed in terms of mental and emotional turmoil. The gendered implications of what this represents about contemporary depictions and perceptions of femininity will be considered later in the chapter. The process of her removal from adhering to the norms and averages of society to the status of abnormal outsider is complete when she is represented as the stock figure of the staggering, “crazy” subject. The media plays a crucial role in Sheba's expulsion from the group. Sheba's affair is established as a matter of concern and comment for society through its representation in tabloid media stories. The capitalisation of ‘Most Hated Woman in Britain’ invokes the

media headlines that serve as a metonym for the collective group – society – that express their disapproval for her actions. Sheba's suggestion that she can 'say whatever' she wants as a result of her social demotion at the hands of the media creates a contrasting image between sane, civilised, censored sociality and the uncensored outbursts of the individual who is positioned on the outskirts of society. The implication is that Sheba, as "crazy person", no longer has to discursively adhere to social expectations of her.

Notes on a Scandal is set against a backdrop of crisis – the first of Girard's stereotypes of persecution. The setting of the school – operating as a microcosm of society – is represented through the eyes of the fatigued, disillusioned teachers as a chaotic institution in turmoil. The teachers' role is reduced to the daily maintaining of control over the riotous student body. The students are described as smoking and fighting. Our narrator is assigned the task of writing a report investigating a school trip during which a group of pupils go on a shoplifting rampage. Sheba is depicted as entirely lacking authority in her classroom, which descends into anarchy. Her inability to control the pupils in her third week as a new teacher at the school acts simultaneously as an example of the chaos that denotes the social and cultural crisis:

The entire Year Eight class was having a clay fight. Several of the boys were stripped to the waist. Two of them were endeavouring to topple the kiln. Samuels discovered Sheba cowering, tearfully, behind her desk. 'In ten years of teaching, I've never seen anything like it,' he later told the staffroom. 'It was *Lord of the Flies* in there' (Heller, p.23).

The group of students and the group of colleagues in the staffroom that are denoted in the teacher's account are depicted even at this early stage as collective groups which Sheba is posited as external to. Furthermore this serves as a demonstration of the vulnerability that demarcates her as possessing victim characteristics, which will be

examined further below. We see Sheba as childlike, and as being unable to master the boundary between adults and children. It is the contravention of this boundary that ultimately constitutes her “criminal act” but also, in light of Girard’s stereotypes, eliminates the “differences” that underpin contemporary society.

Challenging Representations of Victimhood

If we accept the scapegoating mechanism as a process of establishing an individual as being chosen as a common opponent, through which the group unites and social harmony is restored, we can begin to recognise how the group absolves themselves of any responsibility for social disharmony. This is attained by blaming the scapegoat and crucially by highlighting how different the scapegoat is from the norms of the group. This resonates with what we have already established about the production of notions of normality and the ways in which they are established through a process of identifying and denouncing that which is deemed abnormal. In *Notes on a Scandal*, the titular scandal exemplifies the discourse that facilitates this process of attributing blame to an individual as a means of deflecting it from the group:

Scandals are rituals of collective absolution: moments when a society confronts the short-comings and transgressions of its members and by working through the sometimes painful process of disclosure, denunciation, and retribution, ultimately reinforces the norms, conventions, and institutions which constitute the social order.¹²¹

Scapegoating, then, can be seen as the narrative that surrounds the process of dealing with an individual who, once they have crossed the legal boundaries, experience a change of status and are no longer defined in terms of their fully human subjectivity. What the literary texts that reveal mimetic desire, or reveal evidence of scapegoating,

¹²¹ Thompson in Lull, James and Hinerman, Stephen (eds), [*Media scandals : morality and desire in the popular culture marketplace*](#) (Oxford : Polity, 1997) p.57

allow us to do therefore is to focus not on the act or attack itself, but to focus on the discourse that responds to the attack to the status quo, and the ways in which it re-establishes societal order. Novels – especially in emphasising their distance from the real, whilst simultaneously reflecting and engaging with it, as will be discussed further in Chapter Five – disrupt the normal emotive process, or at least facilitate a minimising of the emotional response evoked by the victims and force a more analytic perspective. The scapegoat theory offers a framework through which we can reframe the perpetrators as victims of a social mechanism without exonerating them or diminishing their moral and legal transgressions.

The novels examined here facilitate a more logical reading of the protagonists' criminal acts than would be expected from the conventions of crime or detective fictions, or from media accounts of real life events. One of the ways the authors achieve this is through an active minimising of the victims' roles in favour of representing the offenders and the social response to their transgressions. Rather than evoking deep sympathy by exploring the physical, emotional and psychological experience of their traumatic experiences, the victims of the crimes committed in the novels examined are all represented as minor characters. Their roles in the proceedings are purposefully downplayed by the authors. In *We Need to Talk About Kevin* we are provided with a list of Kevin's victims:

I have made a study of those victims, whether or not he cares to examine the list himself. At first glance it was a disparate group, so motley that their names might have been drawn from a hat: a basketball player [...] a gay ballet student, a homely political activist, a vain teen beauty [...]. Slice of life; an arbitrary assemblage of eleven characters scooped willynilly from the fifty or so whom our son didn't happen to like (Shriver, p.291).

Eva's examination of Kevin's victims has the aim of ultimately establishing that he deliberately selected those individuals who expressed a fervent passion or desire. This

resonates with Girard's descriptions of the violent and antagonistic nature of mimetic desire. Furthermore, in drawing attention to, and defining each of these characters in terms of, these passions, Shriver actively minimises their individual characteristics in favour of a caricature illustration of recognisable "types" of teenager. We are provided with a 'slice of life' – which reminds us that this is a fictionalised representation. As we will see in Chapter Five, the novel resonates with the role of the simulacral image in contemporary reality. Shriver highlights that Kevin's victims provide an outline of the *image* of a group of individuals, emphasising the role of the media, film and television; these characters may plausibly be found in any depiction of a high school across America. On one hand this could create the emotive response that the characters that were brutally killed by Kevin represent the every-teen, stirring up fears in the reader - reminding them of the real-life events such as Columbine. The mediated reaction is that these tragic consequences of the whims of a "madman" could happen to anyone at any time. However, the effect of Shriver exposing these writerly broad brush strokes in this context in fact serves to diminish the empathy felt by the reader towards the characters. That is not to say that the reader does not feel profoundly moved or upset by the depiction of their deaths, but that the novel's remit has not extended to provide an overview of their stories, refusing any deep engagement with the characters. The traits that make them individuals have been denied. This in turn situates the victims of the crimes at a remove from the novel's - and thus the reader's - central concern, which has been concentrated instead upon Kevin's formative years and maternal relationship. The fascination with the enigmatic "mad" other is prioritised over sympathy for the injured parties.

As we have seen, in *Notes on a Scandal* Barbara outlines that, despite the fact that Sheba is the perpetrator of the crime and Connolly the victim, they are both assigned

these statuses only on the grounds of their position on either side of the ‘arbitrarily imposed age bar of sixteen years’(Heller, p.83):

Connolly was officially a ‘minor’ and Sheba’s actions were officially speaking ‘exploitative’; yet any honest assessment of their relationship would have to acknowledge not only that Connolly was acting of his own volition, but that he actually wielded more power in the relationship than Sheba (Heller, p.84).

Despite the legal summation of the case defining Sheba as the perpetrator and Connolly as the victim, this depiction of the distribution of power within the relationship redefines Sheba in terms of her passive behaviour and reminds us again of her victim characteristics. The fully consenting and sexually assertive fifteen-year old “victim” of the sexual misdemeanour raises questions about the nature of victimhood and legal borderlines. Connolly is permitted just a single line in response to the events, which, rather than denoting the terrified silence of an abuse victim, represents his sexual awakening and initiation into the conventions of masculinity:

Just after the scandal broke, a *Sunday Express* reporter ambushed Connolly outside his house and asked him what had drawn him to his teacher. Connolly, in what is his sole public statement about the affair to date, replied, ‘I fancied her, didn’t I?’ before being whisked by his mother to his father’s waiting cab. The line is now famous. I understand it has become a kind of humorous catch-phrase in the media (Heller, p.117).

Connolly becomes a media staple, with his ‘catch-phrase’ operating as a metonym for the image of the red-blooded, lusty teenage male discussing his first sexual conquest. His brief response is celebrated, downplaying both his victim status and also the seriousness of the crime, deeming it a safe source of entertainment. The representation of the affair through the medium of tabloid scandal is explored later, with further focus on the gendered biases that underpin the discourse. The allusion to the media story serves as a reinforcement of the ways in which contemporary society normalises

(hetero)sexual manhood. It also eradicates any notion of Connolly as victim by reducing him to a single-line amplification of the image of a teenage boy, reframing his “abuse” as a rite of passage.

The minimising of the victims’ roles is, in fact, a common feature of all four of the novels examined in this thesis. In *Engleby* we encounter his victim Jennifer only through a reproduction of her diary entries, and in *Remainder*, as we will see in the following chapter, the victims that are shot are so devoid of identity that they are referred to by number instead of name. By diminishing the focus on the victims, the authors displace the emotional response to the crimes that are represented. In this way the reader is free from the sympathetic responses evoked by the gratuitous depictions or the (outwardly) overtly moralistic conventions of media representation of the real life equivalents to these stories. Instead the reader is reminded of the fictional status of what they are reading, within which they can examine their responses to the representations of the perpetrators and of the systemic social responses to the events.

By emphasising the victim characteristics of the perpetrators, and by minimising the focus on the victims, the authors encourage their readers to suspend their emotional response and instead shift to a more analytical and critical examination of what is being represented. However, while an emotional response may be suspended, it must be acknowledged that aligning the perpetrators of the crimes represented in the novels with the traditional notion of a scapegoat feels immensely challenging. All four of these authors highlight the role of the novel in allowing a reader to dramatically engage with aspects of contemporary reality from a fictional vantage point. Nevertheless, protagonists such as Kevin and Engleby resonate with real life offenders such as Peter

Sutcliffe, the Columbine shooters and, as we have seen, Anders Breivik, that are widely and emotively represented in the media.

The most obvious anticipated criticism of this reading relates to the victim status of the antagonist. Girard's scapegoat model refers to literature of persecution, and aligning these novels with that model involves reframing the – albeit fictional - contemporary perpetrators of extreme crimes in terms of their victimhood and as victims of persecution. It is perhaps the novels' fictional status that facilitates this reconsideration, with the metafictional references to this status reminding the reader of the stories' distance from the emotive real life accounts. Nevertheless, talking about the novels' protagonists in terms of the role of scapegoat and victim could be perceived as condoning the violent or deviant actions, for which none of the characters in the novels examined in this thesis deny or show remorse. The notion of scapegoat victim and persecution is contrary to the clear "guilty" status of the protagonists and the irrefutability of the events represented, which could lead to an automatic and vehement rejection of this reading of the novels. For Girard, however, the perpetrator having actually committed the crime of which they are accused is, in terms of the scapegoat mechanism, irrelevant. While recognition of the scapegoat mechanism reveals the force of the group in operation against a single individual, its representation does not exonerate the perpetrator of the crime. In fact, to some extent, an actually guilty scapegoat is stronger indication that the mechanism is at play:

The victim must be perceived as truly responsible for the troubles that come to an end when it is collectively put to death. The community could not be at peace with itself once more if it doubted the victim's enormous capacity for evil (Williams, p.14).

The community must feel, therefore, that in putting the scapegoat to death – symbolically by expelling the individual from the group, as we will examine –

they are doing the right thing, and are acting protectively and on behalf of society.

The social harmony that is restored following the expulsion of the scapegoat therefore reinforces this. It is seen as a result of justice being served through the removal of the perpetrator.

The actuality of the transgression, then, still stands. However, Girard's scapegoat mechanism is not concerned with establishing what is morally right or wrong but is 'only interested in the mechanism of the accusation and in the interaction between representation and acts of persecution' (*The Scapegoat*, p.15). By identifying the scapegoat mechanism at work, we can reframe the crimes committed by the scapegoat as something that is *represented* as an attack to the social order that requires a group response. Through this group response of denouncing the scapegoat through the symbolic representation of them as abnormal, the group subsequently reinforces the norms and conventions that enable its continued existence. This is also effective in neutralising any risk of antagonistic violence inspired by the mimetic nature of desire. The individual's actions are not only perceived as illegal acts, but are also perceived as directly challenging the collective group by not conforming to the laws that govern society. By identifying the scapegoat it is the individual, as opposed to society, that is under scrutiny, allowing the mimetic nature of desire to remain concealed.

Girard offers the example of a black male who has actually raped a white female to reflect on the process of scapegoating a genuinely guilty perpetrator:

The collective violence is no longer arbitrary in the most obvious sense of the term. It is actually sanctioning the deed it purports to sanction. Under such circumstances the distortions of persecution might be supposed to play no role and the existence of the stereotypes of persecution might no longer bear the significance I give it. Actually, these distortions of persecution are present and not incompatible with the literal truth of the accusation. It inverts the relationship between the global situation and the individual

transgression. If there is a causal or motivational link between the two levels, it can only move from the collective to the individual. The persecutor's mentality moves in the reverse direction. Instead of seeing in the microcosm a reflection or imitation of the global level, it seeks in the individual the origin and cause of all that is harmful. The responsibility of the victims suffers the same fantastic exaggeration whether it is real or not (*The Scapegoat*, pp20-21).

A Girardian examination of the scapegoat mechanism in this context is not justification of crime or celebration of anarchy or massacre, but an analytical examination of the ways in which the actions of an individual are managed, controlled and coded by the collective. By revealing the ways in which society responds to these individuals, inverting the traditional notion of a victim, we can examine this coding in action. The discursive social quest that often follows extreme crime to ascertain the reasons that underpin deviance offers a further example of this. While the group, usually through the media, debates the best ways - or political failures - of managing the actions of the problematic individual, the bonds of the social are strengthened through the shared focus - the condemnation of the scapegoat.

The authors also draw out the victim characteristics of the perpetrators, resulting in a destabilisation of our automatic rejection of these characters and allowing the reader a more considered response to the deviant figure. As we see depicted in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the contradictory view of the male criminal as monster is the perception of him as being pathologically damaged through inadequate mothering. Throughout the novel, despite the reader's knowledge of the heinous nature of the crime that has been committed, the narrative undermines its own account, offering instances of sympathy for the antagonist throughout his childhood. The reader's sympathies are situated at a

remove from the mother-narrator, whose rejection of her own traditional feminine roles and admission of her struggle to form a maternal attachment contribute to an overriding narrative aloofness. As we saw in Chapter Three, running parallel to her retrospective account of Kevin's crime is the process of Eva's own civil indictment for 'criminal parental negligence'. Kevin's legal responsibility for his crimes, then, can be cast into doubt by his taking of Prozac – the psychiatric defence – or by inadequate mothering. This assertion of Kevin's masculinity through basing blame on Eva's fractured femininity is a favoured view of the media: 'With such an ice queen for a mother, little wonder, observed our local *Journal News* that *KK* turned out *bad boy*' (Shriver, p.467).

Notes on a Scandal - in a further confusion of the "differences" that denote sexual norms - obfuscates sexual desire and maternity, with Sheba's initial feelings towards the boy being overtly maternal. The ambiguity constructed by Barbara suggest multiple readings of Sheba's behaviour are possible, from Sheba confusing her maternal feelings with her desire, to Sheba as arguably using her maternity to abuse a position of trust. This is in spite of Barbara's initial claims that her version of events would offer a clear picture of Sheba's true nature, implying that her motivation arose out of friendship. Barbara claims naivety, admitting an inability to fully comprehend Sheba's rationale:

At times she will insist that she was guilty of nothing more than maternal fondness for Connolly and was utterly ambushed when he first kissed her. At other times, she will coyly volunteer that she 'fancied' him from the start. I dare say that we shall never know for certain the exact progress of her romantic attachment (Heller, p.49).

Contrary, however, to this alienation from the confusion of maternity and sexuality, is Barbara's description of her actions towards Sheba, which echo those of Sheba to Connolly. Sheba is often depicted as a little girl. Barbara employs absurd imagery that

almost borders on the grotesque, describing her sleeping ‘like a giantess’ on a pink and white princess bed (Heller, p.3), or shuffling downstairs in her nightdress and socks (Heller, p.8). When Sheba returns from a walk in the rain in distress after arguing with her daughter, Barbara moves to help undress Sheba and attempts to remove Sheba’s shoes (Heller, p.214). This conjures an image of Barbara, a woman twenty-years Sheba’s senior, in a maternal role, caring for the vulnerable younger woman, and equally one that reveals a homoerotic desire for Sheba’s nudity.

After the affair is discovered, and consequently ended, Sheba sculpts a large statue that Barbara initially believes presents a mother and child, but on closer inspection realises that it is an icon denoting Connolly lying in Sheba’s lap. Barbara obstructs Sheba’s attainment of her desires through the speech act of her underhanded cry of scandal, and symbolically through the physical destruction of the statue with an axe. Regardless of the interpretation of Sheba’s desires, Barbara’s intervention puts an end to the possibility of Sheba’s continuation of any normalised relationship with Connolly, with her husband, or with her children.

The sculpture wasn’t nearly as tough or as dense as I had expected. I missed it with my first swing but as soon as I actually made my target, I crushed the boy’s torso straight off. Tiny splinters of clay flew through the air. One large shard landed in Eddie’s compost heap. I glanced up at one point, and saw Sheba, watching me from her window, a solemn Victorian wraith. I waved cheerfully and then I went on. With my second blow I took the top of the boy’s head off cleanly, like an egg. Within five minutes, there was nothing left but Sheba’s crossed legs and a small jagged remnant of her abdomen (Heller, p.243).

The remaining piece of the statue symbolises a refusal of further penetration - possibly in anticipation of a homosexual relationship - and the impossibility of further pregnancy and motherhood. This positions Sheba as equivalent to Barbara – a non-sexualised,

non-maternal being, and as submissive to her. Sheba's victim characteristics, and her role as scapegoat, are augmented with her social expulsion.

Heller's choice of names for her characters serves as a thinly veiled allusion to the mimetic nature of desire – Sheba *Hart*'s unguarded desires and affairs of the heart are scrutinised through a scandal that is instigated through the indiscretion of Barbara *Covett*, who throughout the novel reveals her own covetous nature. Furthermore, the names' connotations portray a hunting analogy. *Hart*, denoting a deer, amplifies the notion of Sheba as victim of prey. *Covett*, being close to 'covert' – which is defined as 'a thicket in which game can hide'¹²² reinforces Barbara's self-appointed role as Sheba's protector. The function of game animals, however, is for them to be hunted and ultimately slain. The prey has a specific role – providing a focal point for the group to converge on. The covert therefore offers artificial respite and is powerless to change the victim's fate at the hands of the hunting party. Barbara's role can be seen to an extent, therefore, as part of the "sport" of Sheba being the victim of the phenomenon of scandal.

Barbara uses gold stars, to explicitly signal to the reader exactly where they are required to pay attention: 'I shall be using these to mark the truly seminal events. I've already used a star, for example, to indicate the first time that Sheba and I spoke in the staffroom' (Heller, p.24). This reveals the discordance between Barbara's value system and that of the reader's - while the reader seeks the titillating promise of the fully detailed sexual expose implied by 'seminal' events, Barbara prioritises and attaches disproportionate significance to moments that are of no real consequence. Barbara's atypical priorities unnerve and immediately establish her clearly within the literary tradition of the unreliable narrator. In addition, as stars are usually employed by

¹²² Concise Oxford English Dictionary 11th edition (revised) (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006). p.331

teachers as a reward system, it is suggested that Barbara could be marking the achievement of small goals that edge her towards her final aim – the separation of Sheba from her family (symbolising her expulsion from society) and Sheba’s dependence on Barbara – augmenting the chilling undertone surrounding the character. Barbara’s concern with Sheba’s story arises out of her alleged motivation to reframe the account from a different perspective. However, despite Barbara’s narrative opposition to the media outcry, she eventually mirrors the media’s social role, positioning herself as alleged guardian of morality, ensuring Sheba remains within the confines of conduct that she deems acceptable. Through her contribution to Sheba’s social downgrading, Barbara has subsequently attained her own social advancement – she has a role and a purpose, and has attained an element of social power.

The rain had stopped by then and she wanted to go for a walk. I let her go alone. I dare say she’ll be alright by herself. She seems quite steady and calm after her rest. And she knows, by now, not to go too far without me (Heller, p.244).

The novel’s unnerving final lines leave the reader with the impression that Sheba’s expulsion from her social status has rendered her incapable of committing further transgression by reinforcing her victim status. The power implied by Barbara’s presence in Sheba not going ‘too far’ without her suggests a mutual acceptance of Barbara’s position of control. In fact, Barbara’s function in the novel has been a discursive one – she carefully constructs a narrative and sets the wheels of the scandal mechanism in motion by “letting slip” the details of the affair. While diagnostic criteria may be identifiable in her character profile, dubbing Barbara a psychopath as some critics have (Logan, 2011) creates a chilling mystique that surrounds her, but ultimately locates this unsettling impression in the “abnormality” of the individual. This overlooks the impact of what Barbara’s mirroring of the media narratives of scandal

represents about contemporary social discourse. Both Barbara and the media signal to the transgressive individual what is acceptable and unacceptable social behaviour – that which constitutes the abnormalities against which paradigms of “normal” can be contrasted and reinforced. Just as Sheba knows not to go ‘too far’ without Barbara, the scapegoating of the transgressive individual through the media signals the consequences of operating ‘too far’ outside of the realm of acceptable social behaviour.

A Note on Scandal

Notes on a Scandal lives up to its title’s claim – it is an annotation of moral judgements and claims to knowledge, looking, rather than at *what* is discussed, at *how* it is discussed. Heller alerts her reader to this emphasis on interpretation in the novel’s opening pages, with Barbara offering her account as a remedy to journalistic inaccuracies. She suggests that while the media sells scandal constructed of sensationalised details, only she can offer a coherent, accurate and truthful version of events. Barbara asserts that her ‘narrative will go some substantial way to helping the public understand who Sheba Hart really is’ (Heller, pp7-8). Heller immediately alerts her reader to the competing mediums of the biographic account and the tabloid exposé.

The complex boundaries between public and private spaces are explored through the literary construction of scandal, which simultaneously sheds light on and plays a role in, the ways in which these boundaries are constructed and ultimately transgressed. Scandal operates by dragging private acts into the public arena for scrutiny whilst upholding that its primary aim is the attainment of truth. The audience of scandal is therefore implicated in the creation of its meaning, broadly from a consumer perspective – the media as a commercial entity will only produce the stories that the

public are willing to pay for. Barbara depicts reporters camped outside Sheba's house, unable to penetrate, but nevertheless converging on, the borderline between public and private. The media in the novel is depicted as offering inaccurate details of the events based on paparazzi snapshots and passing glimpses of the protagonists, packaged as sordid entertainment through the pun-based headlines such as 'Sex Teacher Passes Her Orals With Flying Colours' and 'Teacher Takes Keen Interest In The Student Body' (Heller, p.6). This corresponds to the recognisable image of the contemporary tabloid media as a hungry, commercial entity in hot pursuit of the commodity of scandal. It is because of her ability to freely pass through the physical and symbolic boundary into the domestic space, attained through the development of her intimate friendship with Sheba that Barbara believes she is 'the person best qualified to write this small history. I would go as far as to hazard that I am the *only* person' (Heller, pp7-8). This is continually undermined by Barbara's self-depiction which, as we saw with Engleby's description of himself in Chapter Two, describes interactions with other characters that betray their perception of the character as odd or other. This draws attention to the tension between the exclusive insight that Barbara's account can offer and the unreliability of her appreciation of social interactions and relationships. By depicting her disdain for anyone other than Sheba, who she views as a commodity, Barbara isolates herself, putting herself willingly in a set of one, operating outside the conventions of the contemporary social majority. She orchestrates her own alienation from the group.

In *Notes on a Scandal* the media and the novel are represented as vying for status. The novel we are reading is, in fact, the manuscript Barbara is putting together, outlining the affair from her own perspective. Chapter Five will examine in more detail the ways in which metafictional tropes are used to challenge both narrative convention and the

reader's role, demanding a shift from passive consumer of entertainment to active participant in the analysis of social representation. In establishing the tension between her socially awkward, unreliable narrator and the dubious narrative provided by the press Heller highlights the discursive claims to the authoritative and complete accounts of the event that are being made. This in turn draws the reader's attention to their own role in interpreting these accounts, encouraging a sceptical, questioning approach. The narrator's claim to supremacy over the media serves as a marker to the postmodern reader, who is required to take an active role in the reading of this novel, considering the narrative conventions of claims to truth, as opposed to blindly accepting the stories on offer.

In *Media Scandals*, James Lull and Stephen Hinerman argue that the audience has an equal role to play in the designation of meaning and the determination of the extent of the transgression, by drawing attention to the storytelling and narrative qualities of scandal:

[S]candals are, in the first instance, events wherein moral boundaries are transgressed. Yet how do we know that the boundaries have been crossed unless the events are made available to an audience, who then decide the seriousness of the transgression. A scandal does not materialize until events are shaped into narrative form and those narratives are made accessible to a consuming public, who interpret and use the symbolic resources scandals provide for their own purposes. Media scandals (like media content generally) are pre-digested events which enter a network of personal relationships, where scandal is implicitly evaluated and granted its moral intensity, through personal reflection and social interaction. The scandal, thus, is produced not only by the media, but by audiences.¹²³

The epistemological act of reading novels and news articles involves the internalisation of information that builds and shapes our relationship with and understanding of the external world. When scandal is the subject matter, the reader is also expected to enter

¹²³ Lull, James and Hinerman, Stephen (eds), *Media scandals : morality and desire in the popular culture marketplace* (Oxford : Polity, 1997), p.16

into a public judgement of an individual's private act. The norms and conventions – and of course the abnormalities and misdemeanours – that are implicit rely both on the media conveying something as being worthy of attention, and the reader accepting that this is not paradigmatic of normal behaviour. The novel and the news article, then, whilst placing implicit onus on the reader to respond to the text in a particular way, both purport to offer to support the reader in their navigation of the boundary between public and private and between normal and abnormal.

While the media establishes its own function as conduit for the preservation of social morality through its representation of events that must be made accessible to the public, the representation of these scandalous transgressions can in fact be reconsidered as an ideological veil that conceals the scapegoat mechanism in action. In his article 'The Discursive and Narrative Foundations of Scandal', Peter Poiana investigates the notion of scandal both anthropologically and as a literary construction. In the article Poiana points out the two-fold function of scandal; serving as a signal of social disapproval, and simultaneously operating as a source of entertainment. He comments:

Notably the media has turned the defining characteristics of scandal into a commercial product without effacing its origins in mimetic desire. The appeal to the moral emotions, for example, is one of the common denominators of an industry that thrives on encounters with figures that are prone to rapid social promotion and demotion.¹²⁴

The aforementioned pun-based headlines that are cited in *Notes on a Scandal*, as well as the treatment of Sheba as a scandalous public figure, reinforce the dual notion of the scandal as entertainment commodity and moral proclamation of public disapproval.

Barbara comments:

Journalists are educated people aren't they? College graduates, some of them. How did their minds get so small? Have *they* never desired anyone

¹²⁴ Poiana, P, 'The Discursive and Narrative Foundations of Scandal' *Cultural Critique*, 76, (2010), p45

outside the age range that the local law and custom deemed suitable? Never experienced an impulse that fell outside the magic circle of sexual orthodoxy? (Heller, p.6)

In drawing attention to the orthodoxies expressed by the media on behalf of the group, Barbara defines her own account as the narrative of the individual and draws attention to Sheba's position, as deviant figure of scandal, on the outside of this group. Barbara's oddity of character augments the aligning of Sheba (post-transgression) with abnormality in contrast with the social norms upheld by the discourse of the masses. In complicating the narrative's criticism of the media with the novel's questioning of claims to exclusive perspective, Heller brings into focus the ways in which dominant cultural norms are continually reinforced or challenged through the process of scapegoating by crying scandal.

Poiana bases his argument on the Girardian theory of mimetic desire in which, as we have seen, the object of desire is determined by what an *other* - the mediator - desires. Acquiring the object of desire requires imitation of the mediator, and thus inevitably leads to antagonism, as the mediator is positioned as an obstacle or competitor. In examining the literary conventions of scandal as conveyed through the mass media in this way, Poiana analyses the medium of scandal as based on this notion of primary violence arising from the mimetic desire to appropriate that which the other desires. The audience is concerned, not only with the scandalised individual, but also with the media itself:

Moreover, the public, as consumers of scandal, is a treacherous one in that its loyalty shifts between on the one hand the scandalous figure who inspires feelings of sympathy, and on the other the forces of order whose mission it is to sanction transgressions for the public good. The word "media", through its affinity with mediator or intermediary, amply suggests the importance of this double identification for the continued success of the industry (Poiana, p.39).

Positing the victim of scandal as a figure of concern to be scrutinised and judged by the general public, serves to announce disapproval of the actions on behalf of the group.

The media establishes itself as emissary for its audience, and the audience responds through their engagement with the stories on offer.

The media takes on the role of identifying and revealing accountability and depicting when and how moral boundaries have been crossed and conveying this to audiences. The discursive role played by the media, therefore, is the self-appointed voice of the majority. The media promotes itself as analyser of contentious issues, assessor of value systems and examiner of the validity of social consequences. The audience, as consumers of the story, are asked to respond to the media's initial moral outcry of objection at the transgressive act that it is bringing to their attention. The act is *interpreted* as an act of rejection of social convention in favour of personal desire. The act is *perceived* as anti-social. The discursive response to the individual, therefore, serves to situate them on the outside of the group. Their abnormalities – the things that make them different – are highlighted and presented in an arena for judgement to be cast. In discussing the transgressive individual in this way as an outsider, in terms of their abnormal behaviour, the group reinforces its own norms. If we reconsider this from a Girardian perspective, we are able to reframe it as an ideological veil over the true function of the media: to put scapegoating to work. As Lull and Hinerman establish:

The disgrace that scandals bring presumes the presence of a community to which individual persons are held accountable. Whether these are communities of neighbourhood, culture, gender, class, race or nation, *the disgrace of scandal lies in the collective willingness of others to impose shame and even bring damage upon the scandalizer*. The scandalizer is disgraced because he or she is believed to have violated norms which are then read by members of the culture as known-in-common markers of the offense. Every cultural community has norms and moral standards which are taught by society's institutions as social rules (see Lull, 1995).

Violation of the norms leads to sanctions, which promote outrage that threatens to expel the scandalizer from the community (Lull & Hinerman, p.25).

Gendered imbalance in media representation

In their examination of individual transgressions of pre-established moral codes, Lull and Hinerman differentiate between the scandal and the moral panic. They define the moral panic as mediated coverage of *recurring* transgressions, or concerns about a shift in the dominant moral model (Lull and Hinerman, p.4). While both serve to reinforce the socially accepted moral code, there is a key difference. The scandal's fascination is with the singular experiences of the individual, rather than with the group or with recurring events indicative of an epidemic of moral transgressions (Lull and Hinerman, p.4). The speech act of denoting an event 'scandal' highlights the transgressive person as operating externally to the implied moral codes held by the rest of the group, making them a scapegoat. This destabilises the risk posed by the subject's acts to the status quo, making sure that their contravention of the widely agreed moral codes does not undermine these codes but is instead represented as a personal flaw. The unwanted behaviours are rooted in the abnormality of the individual. As we have already seen with the Girardian model of the scapegoating mechanism, through this process of neutralising the threat posed by the individual to social order, the bonds of the group are reinforced and norms are perpetuated by means of contrast with the transgressor's abnormalities. The media scandal's concern with individual behaviour operates symbiotically with the group:

The media scandal is but the most extreme example of how, in practice, individuals are held to an imagined, idealized standard of social conduct. In this way, mass media become reflexive agents implicitly representing those whose interests are served by the constant reassertion of dominant modes of

thought, driving mainstream values and lifestyles into the assumptive worlds of audience members (Lull and Hinerman, p5).

Through the examination of the transgressive individual's abnormalities, and the collective moral condemnation of them, we can see that the medial scandal is a powerful discursive force in the assertion of social ideals and moral norms. A moral panic serves a similar purpose, but its discussion in the media reflects the grave concerns of society about a repetitive trend or a dangerous group - an *epidemic* that poses a sinister threat to the group. We can view individuals such as Anders Breivik and characters such as Kevin and Engleby as provoking moral panic in the way that they are all contextualised in the *tradition* of lone-wolf killers. The scapegoating model can be applied equally to the modes of moral panic and scandal, with the media announcing a crisis before discursively neutralising it by exploring the individual in terms of their abnormality. The delivery of the scandal achieves this by emphasising the affairs of an individual who has transgressed, as opposed to denoting the next occurrence of an ongoing epidemic. The scandal can therefore be safely packaged as a source of entertainment.

Notes on a Scandal represents this aspect of contemporary media discourse. Despite the involvement of several universal institutions –school education, marriage, family – and the transgression of the boundaries between teacher and student, adult and child, the media designates the events scandal through wide coverage and by packaging it as entertainment. This implies that Sheba and Connolly's affair is an isolated occurrence and therefore not sufficient to give rise to a moral panic. The media is represented as dealing in the novel with these transgressions in a light-hearted way. Barbara draws attention to the differentiation between the official, moral reaction to Sheba's crime, and the way in which it is received by the consumers of the scandal:

Oh, the official response to Sheba's crime is very severe. They all say that she has committed a 'despicable' crime. But behind their hands, they're smirking. When I was in the pub the other night, buying cigarettes, Sheba's face appeared on the television screen for a second: immediately a great roar of salacious laughter went up around the bar. 'Dirty girl,' I heard one man say to his friend. 'Wouldn't mind a bit of that myself' (Heller, p.85).

Heller depicts the audience of scandal as a masculinised general public, which contrasts starkly with Sheba's femininity. The humour with which the headlines are conveyed, and the subsequent bawdy reactions of the men in the pub, demarcate the crime as firmly within the realm of entertainment, as opposed to inciting a strong need for a moral outcry. It is perceived, socio-culturally, as benign. Sheba's attractiveness is highlighted throughout the novel in terms of her femininity, leading to the 'widespread perception that their relationship was the smutty stuff of Carry On films' (Heller, p.117). This in turn suggests that she is considered "safe" by both the media and its audience, as a figure to ridicule, and as one which does not represent a significant threat to the moral status quo. As we saw earlier, the media depends on the reactions of audience members to co-create the issues that serve as a simultaneous source of entertainment and site of moral sanction. This gendered imbalance then, is both a product of the dialogue established between the media and the audience, and a reflection of the deeply patriarchal codes embedded in society.

Barbara asserts, however, that the legal ramifications of the transgressions will be equal to those received by a man, stating that the fact Sheba is female will do nothing 'except deny her the grandeur of genuine villainy' (Heller p.86) and invoking these cultural codes. Barbara draws attention to the gender inequalities of the representation – Sheba's gender does not afford her any *official* protection from the legal consequences of crime, but nevertheless precludes her from the perceived ideological benefits of being represented as a powerful threat to the public at large. Whereas her male

counterpart would be represented strongly and – as Barbara puts it – grandly as a villain, a female deviant's bearing on society is diminutive. As we saw in the previous chapter with the diminished responsibility clause, aspects such as mental abnormality or femininity are perceived as offering the individual a beneficial way of being viewed and treated by society. The novels examined in this thesis strongly challenge this, however, through their uncovering of concealed contemporary social codes. Reading these novels through an application of the scapegoat mechanism allows us to ascertain contemporary cultural claims to power as well as the suppressing of that which threatens or challenges the status quo.

The discursive exchange between the media, who deliver the scandal, and its audience's response which signals an acceptance of the topic as a symbolic resource of value forms a self-referential cycle of production (Lull and Hinerman, p16). This comprises a social transaction that fortifies the model of woman as being defined by a certain set of attributes, and man by another. While on one level the social response is one that reinforces the equality between the sexes, the levity of the register of the media scandal as represented by Heller depicts woman as fundamentally innocuous, even when she commits an illegal act.

Barbara compares Sheba's media reception to that of a hypothetical male equivalent, suggesting that a reversal of gender roles would receive starkly different media treatment, invoking the aforementioned concern that surrounds a perceived moral threat. She states that 'it's hard to image Sheba's male equivalent eliciting such a ribald reaction.//Male sex offenders are never funny' (Heller, p.84) before going on to expand:

Perhaps the vehemence with which we respond to men's sexual transgressions is proportionate to how uncomfortably common we know

those transgressive urges to be. A woman who interferes with a minor is not a symptom of an underlying tendency. She is an aberration (Heller p.86)

The implication is that the urgency to act preventatively only occurs in the event of sexual transgressions committed by a man, in fear that it is symptomatic of a shift in accepted cultural norms and poses a real social threat. Conversely, Sheba's gender renders her benign – she represents a group without the power to effect such a change. The media - when gender is considered comparatively - represents woman as posing no real threat to the moral codes and norms of society. Sheba's representation in the media can be seen to point to this gendered imbalance. However, when the novel is read as revealing scapegoating in action, we can reconsider the communicative double-standard that is prevalent in contemporary mass communication as an active social mechanism that is working in the interest of the pre-existing patriarchal norms.

Paradigms of normal sexuality

Notes on a Scandal draws our attention to the profoundly patriarchal codes that underpin the cultural representation of contemporary reality. As we have seen, Connolly's power correlates to the notion of consent. While Sheba's indecent assault charge is based on Connolly's minor status designating him as being legally too young to consent to sex, his pursuing of Sheba complicates this, forcing the reader to consider the charges against Sheba, and to examine the categorical application of the law. Connolly promises "I won't lay a finger on you if you don't want me to," (Heller p.74) implying that while the sexual act consists of Connolly's physical touch, the criminality lies within Sheba's expression of desire.

Sheba is depicted as an entirely passive character but for the crime to take place she must actively grant permission for the boundary between her and Connolly to be crossed. The upholding of this boundary is her legal responsibility as an adult in a position of authority. She refers to Connolly as being 'in transition' from boy to man. The boundary's infiltration symbolises Connolly's crossing into manhood, while simultaneously symbolising Sheba's descent into deviance. Despite Sheba's deviant status being secured by the act, her victim characteristics are continually reaffirmed. Sheba - who is submissive in all of her relationships; with her husband, with Connolly and, crucially, with Barbara - is depicted as wearing girlish, floaty layers and is defined in terms of her femininity.

One (fictional) article cited in the novel poses the question, 'What red-blooded fifteen-year-old wouldn't welcome a roll in the hay with Sheba Hart?' (Heller, p.84). The normalisation of Connolly's involvement in the affair in contrast with the disparagement of Sheba further demonstrates the way in which the media reinforces sexual norms. Connolly's attraction to an older, maternal figure being described as 'red-blooded' - defined by an organic, fundamental life force inherent to the survival of the human body - shows the depiction of this as paradigmatic of "normal" heterosexuality.

This representation of masculine normality is starkly contrasted with the intrinsic mentality of the natural female experience in the novel, when Barbara is struck by the defining of Sheba's crime in pseudo-pathological terms:

These reporters write about Sheba as if they were seven-year-olds confronting the fact of their parents' sexuality for the first time. 'Despicable' is one of their big words. 'Unhealthy' is another. Sheba's attraction to the boy was 'unhealthy'. Her marriage was 'unhealthy' too.

The boy had an ‘unhealthy’ interest in winning her approval. Any sexual arrangement that you can’t find documented on a seaside postcard fails the health test as far as they are concerned (Heller, p.5).

The abnormality of Sheba’s desire is expressed in terms of its position on a seemingly continual, and therefore encompassing, spectrum of “healthiness”. When this is considered in conjunction with the refusal of shock at her behaviour from the male audience members of the depiction of the scandal, we can see that its pathology is defined as outside of the normative ideals, but within the scope of the peculiarities expected from a woman. The novel’s treatment of gendered response through the mass communication of the media reveals that society’s lack of concern at female transgressions can be said to be rooted in - while perhaps perpetuating - the notion of woman as pathologically unstable being understood as typical of the gender in its entirety.

Hilary Allen’s 1987 study *Justice Unbalanced; Gender, Psychiatry and Judicial Decisions* challenges the gendered beliefs that seem to underpin both jurisprudence and the operation of psychiatry within the domain of the legal system. Allen looks at a total of 129 cases: 25 male and 24 female homicide cases, 11 male homicides involving “domestic killings” and 33 male and 36 female cases, all of which were referred for psychiatric assessment. Her investigations look not only at statistical data, but at the empirical information that can be extracted from comparing the written accounts of each case.

Allen’s report documents patterns reflecting psychiatric disposals, where the outcome of the criminal case is determined by psychiatric factors. While at first glance there are more male psychiatric disposals per annum, when viewed comparatively, Allen notes that there are also a great deal more male convictions. When re-evaluating this data

accordingly, Allen shows that, proportionally, females receive a psychiatric disposal instead of a purely penal ruling around 2.5 times more than in cases of male offenders.

Allen acknowledges that a possible explanation for this is that females report more psychiatric symptoms than men, but disproves this by demonstrating that the excess in psychiatric disposals for criminal women is much higher than the excess in psychiatric reporting in general. However, despite Allen's swift dismissal, the increase in psychiatric reporting in general coupled with the even bigger increase in psychiatric disposals for criminal women, could both be argued to be indicative of a wider trend – women being coded “mad”. Women report psychiatric symptoms more often than men – this could show that they are more self-aware and so are able to recognize and report psychological symptoms to the appropriate bodies. It could indicate that they are more able to communicate their experiences. It could mean that they actually experience more psychiatric disturbances than men do. However, as Allen explores, the figures may also demonstrate that the contemporary woman's experience is associated with madness, whereas the contemporary male's experience is distanced from madness.

Building on her observations of quantifiable data, Allen examines the case material associated with each homicide and draws comparisons and parallels between them.

Allen aims to extract the fundamental gender implications within the text of the reports and transcripts to reveal the underlying socio-cultural biases within the legal and psychiatric systems. One stark difference Allen notes between the write-ups of female and male case reports are that:

In the female cases, the constant references to the defendants' troubled minds are used to embed their crimes in a context of 'natural female experience': emotionality, vulnerability, victimization. The female offender is made to seem *normal* and any sense of shock at her behaviour is neutralized by the implication that under such circumstances any ordinary woman might have responded in such a way (Allen, p.47).

This is exemplified by extracts from the texts which refer to how the defendant is, or was, feeling, and even make reference to women's altered emotional state during menstruation. In contrast, the male cases are described in terms of extremes of behaviour:

Stress is laid upon the aberrant and entirely singular nature of the defendant's mental state, portraying it, (as in the classic judicial statement on diminished responsibility) as 'a state of mind so different from that of ordinary human beings that a reasonable man would call it abnormal (Allen, p47).

Although purported as being in opposition to the media's approach, Barbara's ostensibly more sympathetic narrative in fact also positions Sheba as the antithesis to normalised sexuality, seemingly enticing the reader into a deep psychoanalysis of her flawed character. Sheba's relationship with her deceased father is discussed - she describes herself as having 'got old without knowing it, still imagining myself Daddy's best girl' (Heller, p.126). In contrast with the removed perspective of the journalists, Barbara asserts herself in the role of Sheba's confidant; 'I don't say much on these occasions. The point is to get Sheba to talk. But even in the usual run of things I tend to be the listener in our relationship' (Heller, p.2). This invokes a patient-therapist image which formulates the basis of pathological explanation for the abnormalities represented in Sheba's desires. By weighing the media prejudices against Barbara's self-elected, dubious narrative, Heller refuses a straightforward study of right and wrong and instead provokes in her reader a consideration of the formulation and discursive reinforcement of social norms and moral abnormalities. In doing this, she opens up the possibilities for us to read her representation of contemporary reality against a model like the scapegoat mechanism.

From a feminist perspective then, far from being advantageous, being pathologised in fact contributes to the masking of the oppression of women through the upholding of stereotypical gender roles as cultural norms. The representation of woman as pathological serves to scapegoat the feminine, whose lack of power is reinforced at the same time as reinforcing the patriarchal norms. In approaching the novels comparatively we can see that the alleged advantages and disadvantages of crime present a picture of the gender differences of modern discourse. In *Notes on a Scandal*, Sheba, after committing the crime of a sexual relationship with a male who was on the borderline of the legal age of sexual consent loses her job, her home, her husband and access to her children. In contrast, although *We Need to Talk About Kevin*'s high school massacre culminates in Kevin's incarceration and loss of freedom, the antagonist himself announces his gains: 'All you people watching out there, you're listening to what I say because I have something you don't: *I got plot*' (Shriver, p.417). Kevin's criminality is defined by what it achieves, whereas Sheba's is defined by loss – of her tangible material possessions, of her defining relationships, of her power.

The contrast between *We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *Notes on a Scandal* again offers an explicit exemplification of the gendered difference in the representation of male and female deviant activity characterised through the presence or absence of the terminology of agency. Sheba, the legally responsible adult in *Notes on a Scandal* eventually responds to the tireless pursuit of her fifteen year old 'victim', who bangs on the locked door of her classroom shouting "I'm going to keep coming back until you let me in" (Heller, p.75). Kevin, on the other hand, plans his murders meticulously, with his calculated choice of outfit described by Eva, who then lists his preparatory actions on the morning of the day he carries out the massacre. Eva goes on to compare Kevin's possession of such determination to act with her own lack of it. She says: 'I

have no idea what it must be like to wake up with such a terrible resolve. Whenever I picture it, I see myself roll over on the pillow muttering, *On second thought, I can't be bothered*' (Shriver, p.427). The contrast highlights the crucial difference between Kevin – who carries out a psychotic, incomprehensible act in a careful and considered way, and Sheba – who carries out a sane and explicable act that reveals her to be foolish.

By questioning the acute imbalances in the discursive mechanisms used by the media, the novel highlights similar imbalances in prevailing cultural attitudes towards women and men. In doing so – especially in blurring the boundary between her work of fiction and the reality it represents through the employment of metafictional tropes, which will be explored further in Chapter Five - Heller pushes her reader to not only question the single event of her protagonist's individual scandal, but also to confront the entire socio-cultural approach to knowing, reading - and scapegoating - the other. In challenging the reader's way of reading through the incorporation of a range of communicative structures the novel can be viewed a consideration of some of the hidden patriarchal codes that underpin facets of contemporary social reality.

Jeremy Forrest

Introducing a further reflective layer, the narrative depicts multiple women's voices, highlighting further its position as a counter-discourse, and emphasising its opposition to the patriarchy of the media. Barbara reproduces within her account the initial paragraph of a response piece penned by Connolly's mother which explores gender stereotypes and is printed by the media as an apology for the ribald article that triggered protestation at the trivialising of the affair:

Sheba Hart's alleged sexual affair with my son - who was fifteen years old when it began - was recently described in these pages as 'a stroke of good luck for Master Connolly' (Every Schoolboy's Fantasy, 20th January 1998). As Steven's mother, I am deeply offended by this sort of light-hearted attitude to Mrs Hart's alleged crime. I find it mind-boggling that anyone should consider the sexual abuse of a minor a laughing matter (Heller, pp84-5).

Heller questions this active media dynamic, which must be seen to be responding to and representing the diverse concerns of audiences, but nevertheless reinforces prevailing biases of gender or sexuality through the power of entertainment. The suggestion of a response piece, as well as the citation of the fictional article, which denotes the existence of the physical textual entity of the article itself, implies a dialogue in which social moral opinion can be explored, developed and responded to, invoking again the power of the audience in the construction of contemporary morality. This is starkly contrasted with the one-sidedness of Barbara's narrative and is further evidence of the tension between the depiction of the role of the media and the novel itself. By pitting the novel form against the media form and having the narrator of the former argue its supremacy over the latter in addition to the latter seemingly offering a rejoinder, the tension between high and low forms of textual information and narrative authority is highlighted. Through the implementation of these textual layers, Heller derides the process of claims to narrative sovereignty itself, and draws attention to the communicative strategies at play in the depiction of twenty-first century transgression.

Mrs Connolly's response piece goes on to question the media's gender prejudices, drawing attention to the discursive duality at play:

I can only suppose that Mrs Hart is benefitting from society's double standards when it comes to sex. If Steven had been a girl, I don't think

anyone would have had the cheek to question his innocence (Heller, pp84-5).

While it is the scandal of the affair that seemingly entices an audience, Mrs Connolly's hypothesis on the reversal of the protagonists' respective genders highlights that what is primarily at stake in this novel is the way that the affair is examined, interpreted and discussed. We are again reminded that the novel is concerned with providing *notes* on the scandal, which it effectively displaces in favour of an examination of contemporary social communicative strategies. A further case study of a contemporary media figure allows us to examine these communicative strategies alongside the novel, providing the opportunity to analyse the 'double standards' as well as consider the version of contemporary reality that *Notes on a Scandal* critiques.

In 2012 Jeremy Forrest, a 30 year old male schoolteacher entered into a sexual affair with his female pupil, who was aged 15.¹²⁵ This real-life event allows us to consider the socio-cultural treatment of the type of reversed scandal proposed by Mrs Connolly in *Notes on a Scandal*. An extensive comparison of the fictional tale and the real life account would offer an insubstantial analysis of both narratives; despite the metafictional techniques used by Heller to subtly blur the boundary between story and reality, her novel is firmly situated within the fictional realm. Nevertheless, Mrs Connolly's article directly challenges her – and thus Heller's – reader to consider the wider implications of narrative prejudice in contemporary society. An examination of some of the language used by the media in the case of Jeremy Forrest, when considered alongside what Heller is asking of her reader, proves illuminating to the examination of the process of scandaliser as scapegoat.

¹²⁵ 'Timeline: Teacher Jeremy Forrest's flirtatious messages led to sex', 21 Jun 2013, BBC News < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-22970462> > [Accessed 25th April 2015]

Evidence of the aforementioned ‘cheek to question’ the innocence of a female student involved in an affair with a male teacher is in fact present in the media accounts that depict Forrest and his pupil Megan Stammers. Stammers’ willing consent to the relationship and instigation of the trip to France which resulted in Forrest’s eventual arrest is widely reported. However, despite this consent, Stammers’ legal status as a child is reinforced through Forrest’s sentence of five and a half years imprisonment for child abduction and five counts of sexual activity with a child. He was also required to sign the sex offender’s register.¹²⁶ While the majority of media articles temper the tone of the reporting with a consideration for Stammers’ consent to the affair, it is illegal for a teacher to enter into a sexual relationship with any pupil under the age of 18¹²⁷ and examples of accounts that strongly define the case in terms of child abuse can be found:

Paedophile Jeremy Forrest was able to have a seven month relationship with a pupil before kidnapping her after teachers ‘repeatedly dismissed’ complaints they were having an affair, a damning report said today

[...]

It later emerged Forrest took the girl’s virginity at his home the week after her 15th birthday.¹²⁸

Highly emotive terms such as ‘paedophile’ and ‘kidnapped’ in conjunction with Forrest being described as forcibly ‘taking’ Stammers’ virginity establish a clear victim – antagonist scenario in which Forrest is held up as a threatening and dangerous character. Although, as already mentioned, this is an extreme example, and the majority of the reporting on the case offers a more balanced view that takes into

¹²⁶ Ibid

¹²⁷ Barford, V, ‘How often do abusive teacher-pupil relationships occur?’, 21 Jun 2013, BBC News Magazine
< <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-22989030> > [Accessed 25th April 2015]

¹²⁸ Robinson, M, ‘Staff at school where paedophile teacher Jeremy Forrest worked failed to blow the whistle 'because they instinctively supported their colleague’’, 16 Dec 2013, Mail Online
<<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2524734/Staff-school-paedophile-teacher-Jeremy-Forrest-worked-failed-blow-whistle-instinctively-supported-colleague.html>> [Accessed 25th April 2015]

account the consensual nature of the relationship, the other stories are nevertheless littered with more subtle - but unequivocally present - examples of this evocative and influential language.

The stories are devoid of any of the humour, or pun-based headlines depicted in the gender-reversed scandal of Heller's novel. While this could be attributed to liberty afforded by Heller's creative medium, the questions posed in the novel serve to heighten a reader's awareness of this absence when subsequently encountering an example in the media. The construction of a victimised figure is facilitated by the pupil's gender, reinforced by the discourse of legal commentators on the matter, who themselves invoke a distinction between fictional relationships and the social and legal realities of the contemporary every day:

“This is not Romeo and Juliet,” said Richard Barton QC. “This is a 15-year-old girl with her own vulnerabilities, and a 30 year old teacher.”¹²⁹

The girl's vulnerabilities are emphasised in a number of articles that define the experience of the teenage girl as being intrinsically psychologically fragile. The notion of 'vulnerability', however, further compounds this notion of Stammers as Forrest's victim, and is used in conjunction with pleas from family and friends for her to be 'protected' from him. Forrest's own depiction is underpinned with allusions to his power or threat – authorities were required to 'set a trap' to catch him, as well as the entire institutions of the school and the French and British police being called upon to ensure the prevention and apprehension of the crime. His actions also generated a

¹²⁹ Walker, P, 'Teacher had relationship with vulnerable 15-year-old, court hears', 11 Jun 2013, *The Guardian*
≤ <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/11/teacher-15-year-old-court> > [Accessed 25th April 2015]

review into significant or systemic failings in safeguarding at the school he worked at.¹³⁰

Notwithstanding the Daily Mail article that dubs Forrest a paedophile, the majority of the media reporting establishes a sombre tone of concern in response to the legal gravity of the situation, without sensationally reducing the crime to a story of child abuse. The media must acknowledge the position of the affair on the legal-consensual borderline. There are nevertheless a number of significant markers that underpin the event's mediatised commentary that can be interpreted as perpetuating the ideals of masculine power and feminine victimhood. The contemporary media cannot overtly project gendered prejudice. However, when the reporting is considered in light of the questions posed by Heller about a hypothetical scenario where the genders of the individual are reversed, we can see that the language and narrative devices used reflect a concealed but profound inequality.

The female deviant in Heller's novel parallels the female victim of the media story, in that she is represented in terms of her fragility. The male offender, on the other hand, is mobilized into a figure of grave concern, who must be dealt with to ensure that the threat he poses to society is neutralised. While both figures are victims of the scapegoat mechanism - in that the attentions of the group are focussed on their expulsion through the definition of their abnormalities - the discursive differences that we can see show a disparity in the way they are scapegoated.

The Forrest case, when considered alongside the novel, allows us to consider the mediatised representation of male and female roles. Heller poses questions about and

¹³⁰ 'Teacher Jeremy Forrest guilty of schoolgirl abduction', 20 Jun 2013, [Accessed 25th April 2015]
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-22991868>> [Accessed 25th April 2015]

directly challenges these discourses, drawing attention to the fictional conventions that they are rooted in. Reading the novel through the scapegoating model allows us to consider the antagonistic potential of the group and in turn the way in which this antagonism must be addressed and controlled. The model exposes the ways in which Heller probes notions of victimhood and abnormality as well as the power that is conferred to men and the benign vulnerability that is reinforced in women. In considering the ostracising of the transgressive individual in these terms, as opposed to the “normal” social reaction to their acts, we can approach them more analytically, letting go of the prescribed emotive responses demanded by the call and response conventions of the tabloid article.

Chapter Five: Metafictions of Madness

The critical self-consciousness of metafiction once seemed to announce the death of the novel, appeared to be a decadent response to its exhausted possibilities, but now seems like an unlimited vitality: what was once thought introspective and self-referential is in fact outward looking. – Mark Currie¹³¹

All four of the novels discussed in this thesis, through their examination of concepts of truth, experience and authenticity, highlight the role of the reader and the position of the individual both as part of, and as irreducible to, the social group. Metafictional techniques are used to explore notions of the pathological, drawing attention to the conventions and narrative structures that underpin representations of abnormality. Primarily, the novels show that abnormality is often represented as an active turning away from the social, demonstrating in turn that normality - as we have seen - can be clearly interpreted as a social construction. This raises questions about transgressive behaviour. Tom McCarthy's *Remainder* examines culpability and criminal intent, asking whether transgression is an active choice or whether it is borne out of being victim of a pathological abnormality, and consequently in doing so, examines the social implication of this.

Remainder's narrator increasingly rejects social connection throughout the novel. While retaining an awareness of the impact this has on the role of the reader, we can see how a refusal of the other is configured as indicating abnormality. This is attained by exploring the rejection of social and sexual connection; the turning away from social norms and exploitative crime. Once the socio-cultural mechanisms have been destabilised, we can begin to examine them from a seemingly externalised perspective, revealing, for example, the gendered difference in the representation and treatment of

¹³¹ Currie, Mark (ed), *Metafiction* (Harlow : Longman, 1995), p.2

others. The novel goes on to explore authenticity and the construction of social reality, invoking Baudrillard's notion of the simulacral. Through their identification with the postmodern, the novels are all able to explore the contemporary, inviting the reader to join them in asking questions about the fabricated nature of reality.

Undermining the Average

We are introduced to the narrator of *Remainder* in a prone position, with him recovering from an accident that left him in a coma. The physical and emotional vulnerability exposed through recovery immediately evokes sympathy in the reader. Throughout the novel's opening pages McCarthy accentuates his narrator's victim status at the hands of others; 'The man who'd crashed into me had gone over Give Way markings, then driven off. Just like the accident itself: the other party's fault each time' (McCarthy, p.11). Moreover, the narrator's membership of social majority groups is emphasised – we learn that he is male, thirty and white. Interestingly, his gender and ethnicity are never explicitly referred to but can be deduced from his sexual relationships and through his contrasting descriptions of Naz as Asian and the man who gets shot as black. This draws attention to the assumed default normativity of the white, male, heterosexual experience. As we will see, one of the novel's central concerns is with the deviation from this position. Following his recovery to full physical ability in the opening chapters, the narrator's social normality is reinstated – McCarthy stresses that he is an everyman through the emphasis of him meeting the criteria of the average and situating him at a remove from elements of diversity.

Once the buy-in of the reader has been secured through identification with the everyman character - the assumed qualities of the 'average reader' are also implicit - the

narrator begins a gradual process of transformation to the position of outsider. This raises questions for the reader about the fallibility of human character judgement while also challenging their understanding of and comfort with the novel form. The reader's expectation is for a protagonist with whom they can identify and after being lulled into the impression of this in the novel's opening chapters, the sense of narrative comfort begins to erode slowly, through the narrator's normalised descriptions of his absurd behaviours and obsessions. McCarthy highlights the implied relationship between narrator and reader in a disquieting manner, as the narrator begins to undertake actions and describe events in a collegiate manner, assuming that the outlook of the reader concurs with his own. The narrator's anti-social acts increase in intensity and thus simultaneously make identification impossible for the reader. As I will show later in this chapter, the narrator's madness is rooted in his total disregard for the other, including the reader of the narrative he is constructing. It is this early tension created between the reader's identification with and their observation and analysis of the character, that serves to demonstrate the stark difference in the expectations and comprehension of reality held by the narrator and by the reader, and by "normal" and "abnormal" characters.

The reader's expectations are repeatedly challenged and thwarted. The novel tantalises with promises of action and fictional excitement but focuses instead on the elements of representation that are usually entirely absent or masked. The novel establishes itself as an exploration of the everyday through the invocation of anticlimax:

The man who the police had been looking for hadn't been in the house. When they'd realized this, the marksmen had wandered out from behind their cover and the regular officers had untied and gathered up the yellow-and-black tape they'd tied across the road to demarcate the restricted area (McCarthy, p.11).

Remainder remarks on the unremarkable, and in doing so, brings into focus that which is ordinarily unspoken or not creatively prioritised. Later in the novel the narrator describes a tyre shop in such lengthy detail that we begin to become aware of the painstaking extent to which he is outlining aspects that would automatically be conjured in a generic mental image of any tyre shop. In drawing attention to the aspects of description that are often perceived as widely accepted, mundane and therefore hidden from view, the novel begins to probe narrative structure and highlights the possibilities of fictional representation in revealing the ways in which the images that make up contemporary reality are produced and sustained.

This is primarily achieved through an invocation of the fictional status of McCarthy's novel. The reader is never permitted to entirely suspend their disbelief or become mesmerised by the fictional world that is being created. McCarthy prevents this through the narrator's continued reference to creation itself. The narrator's re-enactments arise from a sense of déjà-vu, remembering his building, as we would recognise the stacked tyres and signs outside a tyre shop. Everything is fabricated and contrived in order to create a sense of spontaneous reality. He alienates and scrutinises small talk to expose the concealed fabricated nature of the everyday social:

I'd racked my brains but the exact line had never come, any more than the concierge's face had. Rather than forcing it – or, worse, just making any old phrase up – I'd decided to let her come up with a phrase. I'd told her not to concoct a sentence in advance, but rather to wait till the moment when I passed her on the staircase in the actual re-enactment – the moment we were in right now – and to voice the words that sprung to mind just then (McCarthy, p135).

The narrator recounts an episode, initially alerting the reader to breaks in continuity that seem at first glance to be narrative errors, but culminate in the total dissolution of the semblance of reality that has been created: ‘The waiter came back over. He was...She was young, with large dark glasses, an Italian woman. Large breasts. Small’ (McCarthy, p.56). When *Remainder*’s narrator admits his storytelling, the shattering of the boundary between the fiction and the reality it is representing serves to remind the reader that they are reading a fictional account that has been carefully constructed, including, not only references to the mundane aspects of reality, but also the seeming false-start of the composition of the waiter/waitress character. McCarthy alerts the reader to his utilisation of the process of creating a work of fiction to question that which is prioritised in textual representations of social reality. The narrative breakdown is not presented as a clean break between truth and fiction – the narrator claims some truths within the falsehood – complicating the aesthetic effect of the metafictional trope:

There wasn’t any table. The truth is, I’ve been making all this up – the stuff about the homeless person. He existed alright, sitting camouflaged against the shop fronts and the dustbins – but I didn’t go across to him (McCarthy, p.56).

In her essay ‘Two Directions for the Novel’, Zadie Smith refers to this scene as a change of trajectory and as the novel’s real starting point, interestingly using psychopathological terms as her descriptor:

The narrative has a nervous breakdown. It’s the final MacGuffin, the end of the beginning, as if the novel were saying: *Satisfied? Can I write this novel my way now? Remainder*’s way turns out to be a form of dialectical materialism – it’s a book about a man who builds in order to feel (Smith, p.86).

Smith suggests that *Remainder*’s objective is the destruction of the myth of cultural authenticity (Smith, p.87), achieved through the narrator seeking a feeling of being

‘real’ by contriving every aspect of his reality. By drawing attention to the fabricated details of the account, the narrator not only threatens the transactions between himself and his audience but poses a challenge to traditional realist accounts by drawing attention to and subsequently destabilising the reader’s expectations of the novel form. The reader’s willing suspension of disbelief is exploited and their comfort zone challenged. The novel’s ‘change of direction’ reflects both the novel’s turning away from the trajectory towards authenticity as a literary ideal through the shift of identification experienced by the reader towards the narrator. Rather than alienating the reader, however, the attention that is drawn to the textual craftsmanship highlights the ambiguity that it has caused regarding the process of alienation itself. Through this process the reader becomes attuned to the points at which the narrator’s behaviour becomes other and is challenged by the novel to pay attention to the way in which the human subject is depicted, received and accounted for.

In contrast to *Remainder*’s overtly experimental style serving to jolt the reader into an attentive state, *Notes on a Scandal*’s employment of a similar literary device echoes the meekness (and femininity – as we have already seen and as will be examined in further detail below) of the novel’s protagonist. While McCarthy’s novel undermines its own fictional state to powerfully destabilise the reader’s expectations of the novel form, Heller weaves her metafictional tropes into the story, subtly alluding to the reader of the fictional state of the novel without entirely destroying the semblance that has been created. From the outset we are reminded that the narrative we are reading is in the process of being constructed, but the metafictional impact of this is lessened through the characterisation of the narrator – this is a novel that happens to be about a woman writing. Barbara continually refers to the physical artefact - her manuscript - outlining

writing schedules and hiding places for the work in progress to ensure that Sheba has no knowledge of its existence. While this serves primarily to highlight Barbara's deceptive nature as the character that ultimately brings about Sheba's social and emotional downfall, it also undermines the authority of her account, simultaneously reminding the reader that she is the fictional narrator of the novel being read. Towards the end of the novel, the reader is again alerted to this, by Sheba's discovery of the manuscript and subsequent direct contradiction of Barbara's version of events. Barbara responds:

There are no lies in there, Sheba. There's nothing in there that you didn't tell me yourself.'

She made a strange, guttural noise of exasperation. 'You're mad! You really believe this stuff is the truth. You write about things you never saw, people you don't know.'

'Well, that's what a writer does, Sheba (Heller, p.236).

As well as reminding the reader that they are reading a work of fiction which she has carefully constructed, Heller introduces a further textual layer by scrutinising the careful fictional construction of the manuscript itself. Patricia Waugh refers to metafiction as 'fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality'.¹³² In drawing the reader's attention to this subtly but repeatedly, Heller poses questions about the ownership of knowledge and experience, and about narrative authority. Through the use of metafictional techniques, the reader is alerted to the subversive potential of the novel and the opportunity to examine the socio-cultural implications of constructing realities.

¹³² Waugh, P, *Metafiction; The Theory and Practice of Self Conscious Fiction*, (London: Routledge, 2003), p2.

Despite being socially exiled for her sexually transgressive affair with a fifteen year old, Sheba is able to entirely undermine the authority of Barbara's account, and cast aspersions on the sinister undertone of Barbara's character, by demarking her story as fictitious. The key to this can be said to lie in Heller's use of everyday speech. Sheba's accusation of 'You're mad' is pitched as a colloquial statement of exasperation as opposed to a bona fide diagnostic overview of Barbara's mental health, with Barbara's retort referring to the role of writers in a similarly frustrated manner. The attention drawn to the manuscript that forms the artefact of what is being read, however, heightens our awareness of the significance of these throw-away terms. Barbara's reference to herself as a writer conveys a conflated impression of her own role as chronicler of Sheba's story, when in fact her encroachment upon the boundaries of Sheba's privacy repositions her as a peculiar social outsider. Sheba's name-calling use of the term "mad" in this context similarly draws attention to what the term denotes – abnormal behaviours and perceptions that differ from the widely accepted "truths".

Barbara's continual reference to the manuscript in its embryonic, unpublished form, reinforces the account's provisionality. In contrast with the physical novel that the reader holds, the fictional manuscript is not absolute, destabilising the content and, in turn, any possible reader response. Barbara covertly (as we saw in the previous chapter, the aptly chosen surname 'Covett' further highlights this aspect of her character) hides the manuscript from Sheba. Until its eventual discovery, the reader is therefore also positioned as covert – as being compelled to read on and continue in their voyeuristic consumption of an account represented as garnered through exploitative means. The disdain for the tabloid

media that is depicted in the novel is based on the media's disregard for privacy. This is often self-justified as the quest for the exposure of moral transgression in the interest of sociality. Scandal's existence, as we saw in Chapter Four, depends on a widespread social acceptance of the moral value judgement being conveyed. This suggests that in the same way that we are simultaneously repelled and fascinated by the controversial events depicted through media scandal, we, as readers of the novel, are equally as captivated by fictional representations of transgressive acts due to our natural voyeurism.

Notwithstanding Barbara's attempts at narrative control, however, we get the impression that opposing accounts infiltrate her storytelling. Barbara's continual return to the surface of the account - focussing on her own methods of gaining knowledge and construction of events rather than on what she is portraying - prevents the reader from engaging deeply with the content, retaining her position as central. This metafictional concentration on the tale's surface ensures the reader is continually alerted to the importance of structure over content. This is exemplified when Richard's postgraduate student is asked to describe what her thesis is about. She replies:

‘The modern romantic novel, actually. Mills and Boon books and bodice-rippers and all that. It's sort of about reading reactionary texts in a subversive way.’

There was a silence and then Sheba let out a great yelp of laughter. Megan and I both jumped (Heller, p.131).

Sheba's reaction explodes into the story, making the reader 'jump' - interrupting the narrative with an absurd, unexpected reaction - as well as Megan and Barbara. Sheba is depicted here as frantic and crazed through her unfathomable and extreme emotive reaction drawing attention back to her mental stability which is

continually in question. Moreover this short, absurd scene compares *Notes on a Scandal* with the external literary tradition of novels that examine romantic affairs and scandals. The reader is reminded again that they are dealing with a ‘reactionary text’, and is forced to consider the subversion, or otherwise, of their reading. Sheba’s burst of laughter denotes her disdain for Megan, but simultaneously operates externally to the fiction, in a sardonic reaction to the dissection of her story, or similarly mirth at the metafictional element of the text.

Heller’s metafictional techniques subtly utilise the boundaries of the novel form to examine the ways in which the boundaries of society are constructed, but ensures that it leaves the fiction itself very much intact. The reader is afforded the choice of whether to engage with the metafictional tropes, or whether to continue to entirely suspend their disbelief in favour of the story. When considered in comparison, this augments the intensity of *Remainder*’s refusal of its own novel form and challenge to its condition to question conventionality and that which is taken for granted as “normality”.

As we have seen, the novels reveal the ways in which abnormality, or deviation from what is socio-culturally considered to be mainstream accepted behaviour, is frequently represented as madness – whether through Sheba’s colloquial accusation, or through the diagnosis of a difference in perception as a recognised clinical disorder. As *Remainder*’s narrator becomes other, and the reader struggles to continue to identify with or understand him, his behaviour and experience progresses to be construed in terms of the pathological. This in turn, as we have seen in previous chapters, represents

a discord between the individual and the social. This gradual development begins with him physically and symbolically opposing the crowd, and culminates with his complete break with society's laws, conventions and value systems.

The narrator faces an oncoming crowd of commuters who stream past him in an underground station in the opposite direction. While his physical refusal to travel in the same direction as the group highlights his difference, it is his assimilation of the role of a beggar that is most absurd as it is a complete contradiction of his current status:

I didn't need or want their change: I had eight and a half million pounds. I just wanted to be in that particular space, right then, doing that particular action. It made me feel so serene and intense that I felt almost real (McCarthy, p.42).

Both the metafictional connotations of his reference to himself as being un-real and his physical stance echo his opposition to the reality accepted by the other passengers. The narrator's behaviour is, on the surface, innocuous, and goes unnoticed by the group, who don't question what he symbolises through his pose – a penniless beggar – and fail to recognise that his actions mask his reality of immense wealth. While the only perceived consequence of this falsehood is the narrator's sense of serenity, the ostensibly passive actions in fact imply an active assault on the group's awareness and comprehension of their reality. In his description of his stance, the narrator makes no suggestion that his serenity is a product of this assault, nor that he has any active intention other than the physicality of the act. Where Heller's novel prioritises the trajectory of her story over the experimental form, in this case it is the plot that is most problematic for a reader to accept. The notion that this is the most likely reaction to the receipt of millions of pounds poses more of a challenge to the reader's willing suspension of disbelief than the boundary drawn between fiction and reality. This

positions the reader in the role of judgement – despite his lack of ownership of the active assault on the other commuters’ reality, the reader must determine the significance of his actions and what it denotes. The character, so far in the novel, has been a normal everyman and is now behaving in an abnormal way. Our expectations as readers, of both the novel and of the individual, are under scrutiny. This in turn reinforces the attention drawn to the classification and comprehension of the abnormal, and conversely the social function of normality.

McCarthy utilises images of status that increase in supremacy as the narrator progresses further towards his goal and thus further from sociality and (accepted notions of) sanity. The narrator’s aims for transcendence take him further from his own identification with the other. He describes himself as a Lord in a hunting analogy, then later as an emperor, advancing to: ‘I was the Pharoah. They were my loyal servants, all the others; my reward to them was to allow them to accompany me on the first segment of my final voyage’ (McCarthy, p.255). Finally he depicts himself as royalty:

I folded my shotgun and placed it inside a bag. I liked it now, wanted to keep it with me, carry it around like a king carries around his sceptre. I was feeling even more regal than normal’ (McCarthy, p.278).

His final experience of achieving the goal of his re-enactment follows the fatal shooting of one of his re-enactors during the simulated bank robbery – which will be explored in further detail below – depicting him adopting a Messiah-like pose and viewing himself as physically rising above the people around him:

Once more I was weightless; once again the moment spread its edges out, became a still, clear pool swallowing everything else up in its contentedness. I let my head fall back; my arms started rising outwards from my sides, the palms of my hands turning upwards. I felt I was being elevated, that my body had become unbearably light and unbearably dense

at the same time. The intensity augmented until all my senses were going off at once (McCarthy, p.270).

Without diagnosing or labelling him as such, McCarthy's depiction of his narrator reacting in a gleefully manic way to the chaos and destruction that have been the collateral damage of his project is a caricature image of a mad villain. His megalomaniacal perceptions become increasingly distorted from those around him and his descent into madness is defined as the total severing of his experience from a normative one.

While Faulks stops short of making as direct a challenge to the novel form as McCarthy does, he utilises metafictional tropes in a much more direct and overt manner than Heller in his narrative challenge to the social status quo. As we saw in Chapter Two, Exley provides reflective notes on the journal/novel from within as a means of compiling his clinical psychiatric report. The report serves simultaneously as a psychopathological profile of the protagonist and as a critical commentary on the novel itself, making reference to each section of the text that it analyses as 'chapters'. The novel is reflecting on and analysing itself in doing so, and makes this especially explicit in referring to the novel's chaptered structure. The artefact being read operates simultaneously as a journal, a clinical or legal case file and as a novel. In his use of metafictional techniques Faulks reminds the reader that our social categorisation of people has a textual aspect.

Individuals must fit pre-written diagnostic or legal criteria in order for society to "process" or deal with them in response to their transgressive act. The act either adheres to pre-existing notions of criminality, or denotes the characteristics of mental disorder. Diagnostic criteria are a pervading part of our culture. We respond to written

and verbal accounts of the experiences of selves and others, looking for diagnostic markers and aspects of accounts that situate them within a genre that we recognise. Faulks draws the reader's attention to their own interpretive position – in that they must take an active role in the textual examination, and potential categorisation, of a character. In doing this through metafictional tropes - through a blurring of the boundary between fiction and reality - Faulks stresses that the reader is not only accepting or rejecting a fictional handling of a human subject, but is also responding to contemporary social structures.

Engleby's otherness is explained in the novel by pathological causes, when he is diagnosed with a personality disorder, which labels him as differing markedly in experience and behaviour from the rest of his culture (*DSM-IV-TR*, p.685).

Presented by Exley acting as the representative of the field of psychiatry, the diagnosis serves to offer a clinically defined and clearly outlined explanation for the behaviours that have simultaneously fascinated and alienated the reader. It is however, conveyed - and consequently criticised - by Engleby through his own account. Despite ostensibly basing his story on the fallibility of his memory, Engleby strongly asserts his version of events as definitive, and represents Exley's report as contrastingly provisional. This has the effect of mirroring Engleby's transparent manufacturing of his own account, resulting in equivalence between the accounts offered by patient and by therapist. While Exley's report echoes, affirms and provides pathological definitions of our own readerly responses to the text, its parallels with Engleby's account destabilise it as a cohesive explanation and reveal the reductive nature of the interpretation. In exposing the linguistic mechanisms of the journal, the clinical report and of his

novel, Faulks draws attention to the novel's own literary identity, highlighting the narrative conventions present in both works of fiction and in clinical discourses.

Mirroring further the aforementioned circularity associated with the personality disorder diagnosis, Engleby comments on the commentary. He offers his incredulous reactions to the report, undermining Exley's appraisal of him by criticising his reliance on American psychiatric theorists. This fundamental divergence between Exley's and Engleby's accounts further confounds a passive reading process and encourages the reader to select a position in the "mad or bad" debate. As we saw in Chapter Two, this repudiation of his diagnosis serves, in fact, to reinforce the evidence that suggests that Engleby meets the criteria for personality disorder. His concept of normality differs markedly from that held by the rest of society, but he is unable (or refuses) to accept himself as abnormal. In situating the two accounts as equivalent and drawing attention to the narrative structures that underpin them, Faulks reveals the subjectivity of the conceptualisation of normality.

Human Resources

Just as Engleby refers to himself in predatory terms when describing his role in a social group at university, the narrator in *Remainder* often uses hunting analogies to describe his methods of attaining what he wants:

After stalking it for months, just like I'd stalked my building – stalking it with my small arsenal of craft and money, violence and passivity and patience, through a host of downwind trails and patterns, re-enactments that had honed and sharpened my skills – after this I could smell blood. Now I needed to move in for the kill (McCarthy, p.244).

As well as creating the impression of a passion for violence, the hunting analogy (which also resonates with the hunting metaphor in *Notes on a Scandal* through Heller's use of 'Hart' and 'Covett' as surnames) animalises the narrator, further emphasising his distance from the rest of humanity. He is positioned as a predatory lone wolf – a moniker often adopted by the media in stories about psychopathic murderers. His failure to identify with others and form relationships in favour of using people as resources in the building of his re-enactments suggests a pathological lack of empathy. Like the characters that are masked, the robber re-enactors are given numbers rather than names to strip them of their identity. While this is seemingly to ensure that the narrator's identity surmounts, his own namelessness suggests that identity is not what is primarily at stake. The numbering of the robber re-enactors reinforces his perception of people as resources to be utilised in the attainment of his aims. The tension that has been established between the reader's expectation of normality and the model of what is acceptable as held by the narrator lulls the reader into a false sense of security before the sense of unfamiliarity begins to prevail, as the reader realises the gulf between their own value system and that of the narrator:

It wasn't unreasonable to expect this guy to play when he'd been paid to play – been paid enormous amounts of money, at that. And the hours weren't that bad: I generally put the building into *on* mode for between six and eight hours each day – mostly in stretches of two hours. Sometimes there'd be a five-hour stretch. Once I went right through a night and half the next day. That was my prerogative, though: it had been written in the contracts that all re-enactors and all back-up staff had signed – written right there in big print for them to read (McCarthy, p.149).

The use of people in turn brings into play the question of ethics, with the narrator's perception of moral acceptability grossly diverging from the value system that is assumed to be adopted by the reader. This contrast in turn undermines the very concept

of a value system being something that is innate to us, drawing attention to the constructed nature of social morality and raising questions about its function.

The narrator's viewpoint is at times discomfiting, when the absurdity of his alien outlook takes on a sinister tone:

She was standing with her back turned to me, the mask straps fastened at the back of her head. Her shoulders rose and fell as she breathed. The view I had of her was like a murderer's view – hidden, looking through a thin slit at her back (McCarthy, p.140).

The acceptance or blank-faced compliance – blank-faced in a literal sense for the concierge character, whose face is covered with a hockey mask to prevent the imposition of any aspect of her personality onto the scene – of the novel's supporting characters is perplexing. The novel seems devoid of any objection, resistance or even reaction from any of the other characters. This serves to alienate the reader by shattering any realistic portrayal and reminding them that they are reading a work of fiction by emphasising the subjective nature of the first person narrative.

They both stood there for a few seconds, taking in what I'd said. Then the taller man, the one with the West Indian accent, started nodding. I saw that his lips were curled into a smile.

“You're the boss,” he said again (McCarthy, p.197).

While the vast sums of money paid to the re-enactors rationalizes their taking part, it is in fact their almost total lack of perspective that contributes to the novel's disjointed and peculiar undertone. Interactions between the narrator and characters prioritise progress towards the narrator's goal, with the other characters' feelings and outlooks represented ambiguously, and often entirely refused.

‘I’m Laughing With You’

When the narrator thinks he has witnessed the miracle of the total disappearance of some screen wash that has been poured into his car, he is elated, interpreting the situation as having Biblical significance. A tension is established between the narrator’s lofty aims and the representation of the everyday through ‘low’, puerile forms of entertainment – his theoretical musings on the transubstantiation of matter are starkly contrasted with physical humour. The thwarting of his elation, bringing him back to earth, is achieved through the somewhat infantile comical image of him being covered by brightly coloured liquid in front of an audience of three young boys, much like the use of ‘gunge’ in children’s television programmes being used to cover contestants and garner raucous laughter from the young audience:

a torrent of blue liquid burst out of the dashboard and cascaded down. It gushed from the radio, the heating panel, the hazard-lights switch and the speedometer and mileage counter. It gushed all over me: my shirt, my legs, my groin (McCarthy, p.160).

The reactions of the narrator’s young audience in this scenario, however, are removed from view, as the reader is not permitted access to the perceptions, experiences or emotions of any character other than the focalising narrator, who drives away from the scene in an analytical daze. This refusal of the other means that the cycle of humour is not complete – the absurd action is not met with the appropriate reaction and therefore stops short of provoking a laugh in the reader, conjuring instead feelings of alienation through the narrator’s lack of engagement. This jarring draws attention to the social - to communion with the other - as the catalyst that allows the bizarre to become the humorous.

In denying the reader access to the reactions of the boys McCarthy refuses the normative position of the narrator, and thus engagement with the reader. By omitting the expected next step in the narrative sequence the narrator disallows the humour of the exchange, creating an overall semblance of bizarreness. This removes the reader's power and status by destabilising their interpretive position and ability to identify. McCarthy raises questions about the role of the narrator, the role of the reader and, in fact, about the function of the novel. If the narrator is not narrating as we expect him to, he is in fact transcending the idea of what a narrator should be. Through the narrator prioritising the theoretical over representation of what is recognisable, McCarthy agitates the notion of the normal and draws attention to alternative representational possibilities.

The narrator's repudiation of connection with the reader through mutual humorous engagement is an act of narrative control over the reader, in a similar vein to the control exercised over the other characters in the novel. In refusing the reader's laugh, he precludes the risk of being laughed *at* – being the subject, or the victim, of the joke. Humorous connection with the reader implies togetherness – the reader laughing *with* the narrator or with the author. However, there is an inverse correlation between the ability of the reader to identify with the narrator and the darkly comic aspects of the novel. It becomes funnier - in that there is a comic element to his bizarre nature - as the narrator becomes more remote from the social. While the narrator's abnormal and anti-social behaviour alienates the reader, the pro-sociality of the humour draws the reader back in, creating a tension between ethics and entertainment. The narrator's dry comments complement the misunderstandings or misinterpretations that form the basis of the humour.

Shriver similarly represents this in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, when Eva employs levity to summarise her exasperation at her familial state of affairs:

Nevertheless, I did feel under siege. My daughter had been half blinded, my husband doubted my sanity and my son was flouting his butter-greased penis in my face (Shriver, p.353).

In offering an unexpected lightness to contrast the novel's dark subject matter, the laugh encouraged from the reader is a welcome relief. The tone is suitable for the aims of creating a collegiate relationship and inspiring sympathy from the reader. It is the subject matter, however, that quickly reminds the reader of the inappropriateness of laughter as a response, augmenting the tension created, as well as highlighting the challenge of a moral character judgement of both Eva and Kevin. Eva's tone suggests an attempt to normalise parental problems that are in fact in the extreme of what would be culturally expected – sibling rivalry has resulted in the loss of an eye and teenage indiscretion is depicted as a threatening and sexually antagonistic act. In this brief employment of humour, Eva further undermines her own account by revealing an emotive response that is questionable and betrays her “abnormal” perspective. On the other hand, Shriver demonstrates the impossibility of empathy in such an extreme situation, suggesting that an appropriate response is elusive, thus implicitly criticizing the tendencies to demonise the mother as the “producer” of deviant offspring. Ultimately attention is drawn to the textual nature of accounts of the abnormal.

Just as Eva recognises humour in a scenario where it shouldn't be found, the narrator of *Remainder* expresses a similar failure of comprehension. Many humorous episodes in the novel are based on a fall, bringing together the physical and the textual. When the cats begin to fall from the roofs of the re-enactment buildings, the narrator and Naz exchange:

“Doesn’t it upset you?” Naz asked two days later as we stood together in my kitchen looking down into the courtyard at one of his men sliding a squashed cat into a bin bag.

“No,” I said. “We can’t expect everything to work perfectly straight away. It’s a learning process” (McCarthy, p.146).

This is darkly funny, employing verbal irony to represent the narrator’s prioritising of his project over the welfare of the animals. While the initial reaction may summon a laugh from the reader at the miscommunication, this quickly gives way to the realisation that the narrator’s failure to understand the moralistic tone of Naz’s question is based on his vastly differing moral code. In not entering into the shared meaning of the communication, the narrator further rejects engagement with the social and isolates himself. The effect of discomfort this has on the reader is heightened all the more by the levity of the initial experience. McCarthy raises questions about humour and draws attention to how the experience of the “mad” individual can easily be masked as innocuous misunderstanding about absurd behaviour.

Rejecting connection

The interpretation of the narrator’s behaviour as pathological in conjunction with the assertion of the victim status we see at the start of the novel necessitates an examination of the narrator’s motivations. Ambiguity surrounds whether his disjointed beliefs precede or are a result of his turning away from the group. What is clear, however, is that this rejection of the social is often represented as an active choice, as opposed to an impulse or compulsion that is the uncontrollable result of a mental disorder, raising questions about the notion of the social configuration of insanity.

The narrator severs ties with his best friend Greg, prioritising his re-enactment project over human connection, utilising people as resources and allowing relationships only in the capacity of achieving his objectives:

I didn't call him – not that week, nor the next, nor the next one either. My project was a programme, not a hobby or a sideline: a programme to which I'd given myself over body and soul. The relationships within this programme would be between me and my staff. Exclusively. Staff: not friends (McCarthy, p.118).

The choice to prioritise relationships where the narrator is in a position of control and power also implies an inflated sense of self-importance. The withdrawal from social connection contains suggestions of the pathological in that it offers evidence of an obsession with a project that is to the detriment of the narrator's relationships. Conversely, however, this could be normalised as being representative of the work ethic that is common to contemporary culture. In invoking this indistinct justification for the narrator's anti-social behaviour, McCarthy is not only commenting on the thin line between what is characterised as pathological and what is characterised as a contemporary norm but also further destabilises the position of the reader. The reader-narrator correlation has already been exposed through the direct address to the reader in the aforementioned narrative breakdown. Consequently, when the narrator rejects all relationships other than those with his staff, the reader is necessarily implicated in this and therefore redefined as having a function in the realisation of the narrator's experimental objectives – which culminate in a theoretical challenge to the very principle of reality. The exclusion of Greg from the project implies collusion on the part of the reader, who is compelled to read on after being included in the project but is simultaneously alienated at the suggestion that they are being exploited. Accordingly, to continue reading the novel is akin to consent.

The narrator also rejects a sexual relationship with one of the conspicuously few female characters in a novel that is enormously concerned with masculinity. Catherine's femininity, and in turn, her sexual attractiveness, is only noted by the narrator momentarily when she becomes emotionally animated when describing how she felt while walking around amongst the students in Oxford. She piques the narrator's interest through the metaphor of the students as termites – he is drawn in by the experimental and detached connotations, as well, perhaps, as the notion of physically looking down on and being able to control his captive human subjects. This moment of emotional expression leads to the novel's only implied genuine possible sexual or emotional connection – which is abruptly terminated by the narrator's prioritisation of his re-enactment plans over the promise of sex. His own emotional and mental exploration through his plans to (re)create from this sense of *déjà vu* continues, at this crucial point in the novel, to be illustrated as a pathologically narcissistic project through his active rejection of sexual or social convergence.

Furthermore, in denying a sexual or romantic coupling, McCarthy further thwarts the reader's expectations of the novel tradition, shifting the boundaries of the readerly comfort zone. We expect a novel's protagonist to enter into, or even primarily aim for, a romantic relationship, reflecting the fundamental aim of the human subject. The refusal of this in favour of fantastical notes and drawings is perplexing to the reader – the colloquial “he must be mad” is conjured as a readerly reaction, highlighting the primacy of heterosexual romantic connection in fictional representation. The alienation effect experienced by the audience at the lack of fulfilled sexual attraction draws attention to what makes the narrator himself alluring as a character – it is his otherness that both repels and fascinates. When we realise that the aspiration for sexual connection is terminated – and the few remaining female characters are assigned the

aforementioned ‘staff’ status – we begin to consider the alternative possibilities for the novel.

By prioritising the narrator’s aims for a sense of authenticity over the sexual encounter with Catherine, McCarthy reveals the dominant heterosexism in the representation of sexual relationships at the centre of contemporary culture. The heterosexual relationship – just like the white, male protagonist – is exposed as the default representative position. This is reinforced in the narrator’s description of the inauthenticity of the homosexual men he watches from the window of the coffee shop:

They were mostly gay – scene gay, with tight jeans and gelled hair and lots of piercings. They were like the media types with the screen: performing – to the onlookers, each other, themselves. They crossed from coffee shop to coffee shop, bar to bar, kissing their friends hello and clocking other men exaggeratedly, their gestures all exaggerated, camp. They all had tans, but fake ones, got on sunbeds in expensive gyms or daubed on from a tin. Theatrical, made up, the lot of them (McCarthy, p51).

The metafictional ‘made up, the lot of them’ simultaneously alludes to the characters’ fictional status and the socially stereotyped personae that they actively adopt. The ‘scene gays’ are seemingly depicted as making a conscious, alternative choice to reject heterosexuality. While heterosexuality is challenged by the novel, through its positioning as the fundamental socio-cultural aim and its subsequent rejection, homosexuality is revealed to be equally as inauthentic. The novel suggests, perhaps, that the normalisation of heterosexuality in contemporary culture is more deeply embedded, but rather than offering a liberating platform for alternative representative modes, *Remainder* questions the very notion of authentic sexual identity as a fundamental aim.

Catherine's appeal as a sexual object is brief, heralding, in fact, her appeal as a character, when she is momentarily depicted through her femininity, as defined by her emotion. Prior to this her contribution is the suggestion that the narrator spends his money on a charitable fund in Africa, which is depicted as dull and magnanimous in comparison to Greg's more entertaining and flamboyant suggestion to snort cocaine from the firm buttocks of young virgins. Greg's suggestion is more dynamic but involves humour that contravenes politically correct boundaries and objectifies women in favour of the social currency of pub banter. The feminist and postcolonial implications here remind us that literature often aims to challenge prejudices and injustices. In pitching Greg and Catherine's ideas against each other there is a further tension set up between morality and entertainment. In the instant that Catherine's character appeal is asserted through her sexuality, the narrator is depicted as abnormal in his refusal of sexual connection, but simultaneously creates an air of discomfort in the realisation that sexual norms are based on deeply ingrained cultural codes that both titillate and suppress.

Despite the narrator's avoidance of social integration with others as far as is possible, interaction is nevertheless necessary in order to complete his projects and there is a stark difference in his approach to his male and his female resources. While the male characters in the novel contribute to the progression of his project, the female characters are only ever placed in a position of servitude. Daubenay, the lawyer who secures the £8.5 million compensation, is described as 'kind but stern. Paternalistic' and his instructions are followed without hesitation (McCarthy, p.76). Naz facilitates the logistics of the project, and when he is instructed to appoint a trusted supervisor to oversee important proceedings, instinctively assumes that this person will be a man: '*he*

won't be able to supervise it indefinitely' (emphasis mine, McCarthy, p.166). Women, on the other hand, are employed as waitresses, or are re-enacted as homemakers. The domesticity of their roles is not only unquestioned, it is highlighted and asserted: 'The Hoover was being shunted back and forth across a carpet by the sound of it. The wife re-enactor would be doing it' (McCarthy, p.139). Women are entirely absent from active contributions to the later re-enactments of the overtly masculine spaces of the tyre shop and the street shooting.

This draws attention to acutely patriarchal social structures in which both male power and female submissiveness are subtly emphasised but continually reinforced. While the 'liver-lady' is expected to cook, creating the smell of frying liver, it is the smell that is most significant, as opposed to the female contribution to the objective of the overall impression of the building. The narrator meets the possibility of artifice with indifference: 'She might not have been doing it herself: it might have been the back-up' (McCarthy, p.145). This is almost immediately contrasted with the narrator's reaction to the pianist, who has replaced his own live performance with a pre-recording. While the liver lady's potential falsehood affords a single line of nonchalant speculation, the pianist's recording is met with three pages of enraged reaction where the narrator is rendered pale, dizzy and vomiting. The difference between the reactions to the male and female suggestions of fraudulence crucially represents the divergence in the levels of threat posed by the two genders. The lack of attention to authenticity of a woman's work is not enough to impact significantly on the overall impression of the building, whereas male defrauding suggests a challenge to the power that is at stake and that is being exercised through the creation of the building. The suggestion is that being defrauded by a woman is not as significant as being defrauded by a man as women are

less powerful and therefore - as we saw in Chapter Two - pose less of a threat to the status quo.

Remainder's narrator expresses anger at the suggestion that a recording of the music is equivalent to the live performance that creates the soundtrack to the building's re-enactment. He cites the reason for masking some of his re-enactors as avoiding the overrunning of any other personality with his own (McCarthy, p.164) and in replacing his playing with a recording the pianist adds his own layer of artifice to the narrator's construction. The stark contrast between his reactions to the possibility of male and female deception reveals the profoundly gendered differences in his approach. His enraged reaction to the pianist is an expression of masculinity – he asserts his dominance and control over every aspect of the space. We see a similar, albeit more brief, assertion of his Alpha-status in reaction to the motorcyclist: 'It wasn't his business to make me explain [...] Prick' (McCarthy, pp141-2).

In playing a recording of his music, the pianist threatens the authenticity of the entire experiment. The domesticity of the liver lady's fried liver is not as significant – provided that it takes place behind the door of the private space of her home and doesn't encroach on the narrator's domain - as it correlates to the everyday. The piano music, on the other hand, is an artistic expression and thus must be an original performance, as opposed to a simulacral recording, to ensure that the narrator can feel the sense of realness he is striving for. This reveals art as occupying an elevated position for the narrator in his aim for the real. The experimentation and concern with surfaces of the postmodern contemporary is posited in opposition to this, as perpetuating the semblance of cultural inauthenticity. McCarthy challenges this further, however, through the

narrator's inability to appreciate the irony in the fact that the entire building is contrived, and has been fabricated to his specifications, undermining the aim for, and the myth of, the authentic.

Holding Up the Reality Principle

The question of perception – of whether the narrator understands the moral iniquity of his actions and actively chooses to disregard this, or whether his comprehension and perception of reality is fundamentally different to that of others – is crucial. In the preparations for the final re-enactment, which culminates in the planned crime of a bank robbery, the criminal intent of the narrator remains entirely ambiguous. To avoid the inevitability of information about the event being leaked by one of the re-enactors, Naz calculates that the only possible solution would be to ‘eliminate’ all of the participants in a plane explosion. It is, therefore, Naz’s suggestion rather than the narrator’s to commit the murders, but it is the difference in their seeming comprehension that raises unnerving questions about criminal sanity and moral appreciation: ““The only way,” Naz went on, his voice quiet and softly shaking, “is to eliminate the channels it could leak through”” (McCarthy, p.253). Naz’s conscience is unquestionably attuned – his shaking voice reveals his awareness of the moral implications of his suggestion but prioritises theoretical possibility and logistics over human lives. The primary question raised by the episode is whether the narrator is as fully aware of the ethical connotation as Naz is, and chooses to disregard this, or whether he is cognitively unable to appreciate the wrongness of these actions:

He stopped speaking, but his eyes still stared straight at me, making sure I understood what he was telling me. I looked away from them and saw in

my mind's eye a plane bursting open and transforming itself into cloud
(McCarthy, p.254).

This in turn raises questions about the social nature of the concept of madness and the subjectivity of morality. At this point in the novel the narrator is entirely removed from the 'everyman' figure we were introduced to at the story's outset, and while the narrative remains intact, the inability to identify with the narrator's rationale and moral justification for his actions reinforces for the reader that their role has shifted, from passive observation of action alongside the narrator, to active judgement of the sanity of the narrator's character.

The inconceivability of the motive for moving the bank's re-enactment to a real bank as opposed to the replica bank in the warehouse draws further attention to the roles of others, and their parts in the proceedings. The narrator's primacy in the actions is reinforced through the contrasting image that secures the robber re-enactors' status of innocence. Prior to the robbery, they are depicted as sitting in the car, naively looking for evidence that would demarcate the real from the fictional, pressing their faces to the glass as a child would at a parade or at Christmas:

The other re-enactors in my car looked through the windows fascinated, watching shoppers, businessmen, mothers with pushchairs and traffic wardens walking up and down the pavement [...] They watched them intently, looking for cracks in their personas – inconsistencies in their dress, the way they moved and so on – that might show them up as the re-enactors they'd been told they were. Their eyes followed these people round corners, trying to spot the re-enactment zone's edge (McCarthy, p.260).

This semblance of innocence addresses any incredulity on the part of the reader about their awareness of the significance of the event. The re-enactors' buy-in to the story that has been told creates the impression that they are victims at the hands of the narrator. We, like the re-enactors, are informed of his motives – to re-enact, rather than

to steal – but suspend scepticism in order to witness the way in which it is orchestrated.

The question of madness and criminality is raised here again, with the narrator's intentionality crucial to our ability to define him. His alleged intention to re-enact as opposed to steal offers an alibi for his criminal intent, but positions him as someone who disregards the law for a different, non-material, type of personal gain at any cost.

Both the narrator and one of the re-enactor characters shoot and kill another character.

As we saw in Chapter Four with the other novels' diminishing of the sympathetic responses to the victims, the re-enactors' anonymity minimises a similarly deeply emotive response to this. The narrator's invocation of the darkly comic through flippant and understated remarks such as 'He was pretty dead' (McCarthy, p.269) and 'Two of the other robber re-enactors had joined us in the car now: Five and Two I think, or maybe Five and One. Not Four, in any case' (McCarthy, p.272) jar the reader into further consideration of the narrator's comprehension of the implications of his actions on the social world that he is inextricably part of. While the re-enactor fires the gun accidentally, the narrator explains his identical action in the following way:

He was still moving forwards, lumbering towards me. So I shot him. It was half instinctive, a reflex, as I'd first suspected: to tug against the last solid thing there was, which was the trigger – tug against it as though it were a fixed point that the body could be pulled back up from. But I'd be lying if I said it was only that that made me pull the trigger and shoot Two. I did it because I wanted to (McCarthy, p.276).

The narrator experiences an entirely different morality and understanding to the rest of the characters in the novel. His communication breaks down to seemingly disjointed sentences describing his own mental associations, frustrating any dialogue with the other re-enactors, whose feelings of horror he in turn is unable to comprehend: 'They weren't listening to me. They seemed very unhappy' (McCarthy, p.273). His disregard

for the life of another in favour of his own impulses and desires and the subsequent failure to respond in an emotionally appropriate manner suggests madness, revealing madness itself to be interpreted as a discord from the legal conventions but also the cultural expectations of the social majority. It is the remorseless taking of another's life that entirely severs the tie with the social. Whether or not his inability to comprehend the moral and social implications of his actions is an active choice, the narrator's threat – and therefore what makes him a fascinating character – lies in the difficulty to comprehend, categorise and subsequently control him within the remit of the contemporary legal system.

The narrator holds the re-enactment of a bank heist in a real bank, without the knowledge of the other participants, who believe that they are taking part in a re-enactment and therefore are imitating, as opposed to actually carrying out, criminal activities. While the assertion of the robber re-enactors' unawareness emphasises their criminal innocence to the reader and exonerates them from judgement, the ambiguities surrounding the narrator's sanity and criminal intent complicates this. By undermining the illegality of their actions, the narrator is not merely framing them for a crime they did not commit, he is removing their powers of judgement and choice by destabilising the artifice of what they understood to be their reality. This echoes the aforementioned assault on the commuters' notions of reality in the tube station.

The bank heist re-enactment is an intertextual acceptance of the challenge laid down by Baudrillard in *Simulacra and Simulation* to 'organize a fake holdup'¹³³. Baudrillard's examination of the concept of the real in relation to the order of signs and symbols

¹³³ Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacra and simulation* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), p.21

claims that the world is made up of simulacra - images that mask the absence of a reality that is either no longer, or never was, present. Instead, contemporary reality is made up of symbols that are culturally constructed or mediated. Baudrillard uses the bank hold-up analogy to illustrate this, suggesting that all hold-ups are 'now in some sense simulation hold-ups in that they are already inscribed in the decoding and orchestration rituals of the media, anticipated in their presentation and their possible consequences' (Baudrillard, p.21).

The narrator hires a notorious criminal who has written an autobiography detailing his large scale commercial robberies, to act as a consultant on the project. He echoes Baudrillard's assertion that events such as hold-ups are pre-inscribed, with the actions of all participants adhering to strict cultural programming:

"The staff are programmed to behave a certain way, the robbers know this and the staff know they know, and the robbers know they know they know. So a robbery, ideally, follows a strict action-reaction pattern: *A* does *X*, *B* does *Y* in response, *A* then does *Z* and the whole interaction's run its course" (McCarthy, p.231).

The structure of the socially accepted model of reality relies on these codes being followed and the images and rituals being upheld. It is the blurring of the boundaries between the real as accepted by the majority, and that which is fabricated, that poses questions about this notion of reality as being a construct. The narrator's choice to move the re-enactment from the mock-up bank in the warehouse – where there are clearly defined physical parameters separating the project from reality – to the setting of a real bank, highlights this. While still operating under the name 're-enactment,' real money is removed from a real bank, in which a real gun is fired, killing a member of the group. It is at this point, for the majority, that the action ceases to become discernible as a re-enactment, and shifts symbolically, physically and legally to the status of

enactment, or criminal act – the action prevails over the theoretical. The notion of reality, however, has been profoundly destabilised.

Baudrillard anticipates the failure. In a manner that echoes what was discussed in Chapter Four about Girard's notion of the concealed nature of mimetic desire and the operation of scapegoating, Baudrillard says:

You won't be able to do it: the network of artificial signs will become inextricably mixed up with real elements...in short, you will find yourself, once again, without wishing it, in the real, one of whose functions is precisely to devour any attempt at simulation, to reduce everything to the real - that is, to the established order itself, well before institutions and justice come into play (Baudrillard, p.20).

McCarthy delivers *Remainder*'s bank heist failure through a combination of slapstick and irony – the robber falls after he is thwarted in his attempt to mock-trip. The fall was calculated by the narrator in the rehearsals to preclude it happening during the re-enactment. The slow motion description of the fall and the shot along with changes in tempo and pace offer descriptive, recognisable visual imagery reminiscent of action films:

Their fall was long and slow. Two's left leg had risen from the ground as soon as Five crashed into him; his right leg, though, stayed planted, and for a while held up the whole tangled composition of two heads and torsos, four arms, three legs, a bag and a gun (McCarthy, p.268).

When the novel's pace speeds up again, the comic relief provided by the fall and by the narrator's fascination with the minutia of the event dramatically drops away, again leaving the reader with the stark realisation that the cost of experimentation with the theoretical has been exploitation and the taking of human lives. The novel jars the reader into making a judgement about the notion of an established order, as well as justice and the judgement of sanity and criminal intent.

Baudrillard asserts that a simulated hold-up would not – in theory – be punishable by law, as simulation replaces, but has no equivalence with, the real (Baudrillard, p.20). If it were to be punished, he suggests, a simulation would carry greater significance than a real hold-up, and the crime viewed as more heinous, as it is an attack on, not merely order, but the principle of reality itself (Baudrillard, p.22). The imperceptible distinction between a simulated bank heist and a real bank heist reveals that the model of reality relies on the widespread acceptance of these codes and symbols by all members of society who must abide by them. The narrator's assaults on reality can be reframed, therefore, as an attempt at subversion of this powerful social force. The reader is again challenged to engage with this concept, ascertaining whether the narrator is a subversive social revolutionary, or a dangerous threat to the very fabric of social cohesion.

Baudrillard stipulates that failure to use fake weapons and trustworthy hostages means 'one lapses into the criminal' (Baudrillard, p.20), suggesting that the boundary between the theoretical and the criminal is in fact very unstable, and is entirely a socially construct. The narrator's commitment to the credibility of his re-enactment means that he uses real guns, resulting, inevitably, in the death of one of the characters. His lapse into the criminal is adjunct to his lapse into insanity – he ceases to be comprehensible and fails to express the appropriate, socially coded remorse or empathy at the first death, and commits the second shooting in a detached and experimental manner. The definition of his madness is underpinned by his attempts to turn away from the social and commit such an assault on reality – his social coding as a madman undermines his assault and ensures that the reality principle stays intact.

In *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, Shriver also invokes the representation of contemporary reality through mediatised images, challenging the reader to consider the artifice at stake and reframing the dialogue surrounding Kevin's seemingly incomprehensible violent crimes as having deeper social significance. By continually highlighting and destabilising the fictional elements of the novel, Shriver - as with McCarthy, Faulks and Heller - draws attention to the ways in which her account is constructed, discomfiting her reader and demanding more from them than a passive, aesthetic experience.

Kevin expresses anger when his events within the novel are compared with the Columbine shootings, suggesting that they 'copied' him, which in turn, because of the chronological impossibility, reminds the reader of the fictional world that they are exploring through an invocation of the real. Throughout the novel Eva situates Kevin's shooting, to his frustration, within the tradition of high school massacres, making reference to an array of 'copycat killers,' all of whom are, although not explicitly demarcated as such within the novel, examples Shriver has taken from real life. By situating Kevin alongside his factual counterparts, Shriver frustrates the chronological order of the real-life occurrences and the fictional representation. The novel's literary sophistication refutes the possibility - as we saw with McCarthy's narrative 'nervous breakdown' - of an error in continuity, further shaking the reader out of their reverie and reminding them that they are subject to an interpretive expectation. Both Kevin and the shooters taken from the media stories invoke the simulacral image. This serves to situate the novel firmly within the postmodern tradition depicted by Baudrillard as 'the immense process of the destruction of meaning, equal to the earlier destruction of appearances' (Baudrillard, pp160 -161).

Eva's narrative is undermined by the attention drawn to its lack of scope and limitation, but also by her character. In an episode where Eva loses her temper and throws the infant Kevin across the room, breaking his arm, the reader's empathy is stretched. Additionally, the episode further undermines the authority of her account by referring to fictionality and to the deliberate construction of appearances, serving to remind the reader that they are reading a work of fiction rather than a factual account:

The remainder of that summer defied all my narrative instincts. Had I been scripting a TV movie about a violent harridan who flew into fits of blind dudgeon during which she was endowed with superhuman strength, I'd have had her young boy tiptoeing around the house, shooting her tremulous grins, offering up desperate gestures of appeasement, and just in general shuffling, cowering, and yes-massa-ing about the place, anything to keep from taking impromptu trips across whole rooms of their home without his feet ever touching the floor.

So much for the movies. *I* tiptoed. *My* grins quivered. *I* shuffled and cowered as if auditioning for a minstrel show (Shriver, p.238).

Eva reduces her description of domestic violence to a caricature. Furthermore, her reference to narrative instincts and the creation of a character implies an attempt at a defence of her non-maternal actions on the grounds of media and movie produced images - she refuses to align herself with the villainous character, in part because Kevin's actions do not fit the stereotypical image of downtrodden abused child. The undercurrent of anxiety present within this incident seemingly comes from Eva's expectations of the authenticity of consequences being entirely frustrated.

Shriver further uses caricature in depicting Eva's husband Franklin, who is established early on in the novel as an archetypal American and quintessentially male, by Eva recounting what initially attracted her to him and it being distinct from her usual 'type'. Eva describes him as 'American by choice as well as by birth' (Shriver, p.42) implying

further the power to construct personae. Franklin is defined by his gender, sexuality and by his national identity:

A big, broad meat eater with brash blond hair and ruddy skin that burns at the beach. A bundle of appetites. A full, boisterous guffaw; a man who tells knock-knock jokes. Hot dogs – not even East 86th Street bratwurst, but mealy, greasy pig guts of that terrifying pink. Baseball. Gimme caps. Puns and blockbuster movies, raw tap water and six-packs. A fearless, trusting consumer who only reads labels to make sure there are plenty of additives. A fan of the open road with a passion for his pickup who thinks bicycles are for nerds. Fucks hard and talks dirty; a private though unapologetic taste for porn (Shriver, p.41).

Franklin, like Kevin, invokes the notion of the simulacrum, being made up of a series of mediatised images that project and sustain his masculinity, and in turn Eva's femininity and the heteronormativity that dominates contemporary representation .

Kevin himself echoes this notion of Franklin's inauthentic nature, scathingly referring to his father as 'Mr Plastic' and suggesting that Franklin's concern with image over the real has implications on his efficacy as a parent, and by implication, on genuine human connection: "What does that mean, your dad 'loves' you and hasn't a [bleep]ing clue who you are? What's he love, then? Some kid in *Happy Days*. Not me" (Shriver, p.413). Familial and social affection is portrayed as simulacral, masquerading as something that is innate and natural to all humans. The novel, through the microcosmic family world, highlights and interrogates the representation of the interconnectedness of society as a whole.

The novel's monologic narrative draws attention to the subjectivity of the account. The epistolary form, written from a first, rather than third person perspective, by a less than genial narrator, brings into explicit view Eva's limitations as a narrator:

Indeed, I've developed a healthy respect for fact itself, its awesome dominance over rendition. No interpretation I slather over events in this appeal to you has a chance of overwhelming the sheer actuality of *Thursday*, and maybe it was the miracle of fact itself that Kevin discovered that afternoon. I can comment until I'm blue, but what happened simply sits there, triumphing like three dimensions over two (Shriver, p.188).

This reference to the dimensionality of an event echoes Baudrillard's reflections on the production of the real. In *Simulacra and Simulation* he questions the notion that the more dimensions an image has, the closer it is to reflecting the real. He suggests that in a society where the simulacrum has replaced the real, the addition of an extra dimension paradoxically highlights absence in the formulation of meaning, revealing the image to be what he terms 'hyperreal':

Escalation in the production of a real that is more and more real through the addition of successive dimensions. But, on the other hand, exaltation of the opposite movement: only what plays with one less dimension is true, is truly seductive (Baudrillard, p.107).

Although the central preoccupation of the novel is culpability, we are never offered a definitive answer for *why Kevin did it*, with Kevin himself confessing, 'I used to think I knew...Now I'm not so sure' (Shriver, p.188). Rather than using the novel form to postulate theories on the phenomena, Shriver's exploitation of narrative subjectivity reflects the elusive nature of truth, while the (hyper)realism of the novel poses questions about the human drive for meaning, with the quest for answers, rather than their attainment, making the novel alluring. Shriver, McCarthy, Faulks and Heller all refrain from offering answers, instead utilising the fictional form of their novels to pose subtle questions about the constructed nature of contemporary reality, with consequential implications for the reader, who is repositioned in an investigatory role.

Zadie Smith, in her critique of *Remainder* as offering a fresh new direction for the novel form, states that ‘the American metafiction that stood in opposition to realism has been relegated to a safe corner of literary history, to be studied in postmodernity modules, and dismissed, by our most prominent public critics, as a fascinating failure, intellectual brinkmanship that lacked heart’ (Smith, p73). Smith posits *Remainder* as exemplifying a solution for the ways in which the contemporary novel can challenge the representational ideals of realism. By utilising metafictional tropes, *Remainder* - as well as *Notes on a Scandal*, *England* and *We Need to Talk About Kevin* – draw attention to fictional constructs to pose questions about how contemporary reality is represented. Refusing to be limited by aesthetic experimentation for stylistic effect, the authors implore their readers to consider their own role in judging, assessing and accepting socio-cultural myths. The novels raise more questions than they answer. In utilising metafictional techniques to draw the reader’s attention back to the fabricated and unreliable nature of the account they are being presented with, the authors persuade the reader to examine, not the events that may or may not have happened, but the ways in which contemporary reality is communicated and experienced. By bringing the constructed elements of their own fictional works to the surface and explicitly highlighting them the authors offer accounts of reality through which concealed social codes and mechanisms can be identified.

Chapter Six: Representing madness in contemporary fiction

As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, little has been written on the representation of madness in twenty-first century literature. Some works of twenty-first century fiction are considered in broader overviews of representations of madness in the contemporary literary field (Baker et al, 2010, Lustig and Peacock, 2013), but these critical analyses often consider literary representations that extend, to at least some extent, into the latter half of the twentieth century. By isolating the novels I examine historically to exclude analysis of novels published prior to 2000, I have set out to contribute to the study of madness and deviance in twenty-first century literature in two ways. Firstly I have aimed to provide a critical insight into and reflection on our current culture and society. Secondly I have set out to provide a piece of critical reflective material that can be used by scholars of the future retrospectively to aide comparative work that tracks shifts and trends in the historical representation of madness in fiction.

These novels in particular also seldom feature in critical analyses – largely, of course, because of their recent publication dates. The literary criticism that does exist rarely focuses on the novels’ treatment of the theme of madness primarily. *Notes on a Scandal*, for example, is examined in terms of sexuality (Carroll, 2012) and representations of adulthood/childhood (Prickett, 2011), while *We Need to Talk About Kevin* has evoked scrutiny of motherhood and the nature-nurture debate (Muller, 2008, Wingfield, 2007). By drawing attention to the ways in which these four novels support the interrogation of contemporary socio-cultural norms, I strongly argue for them to be considered as examples of extremely worthwhile and valuable literary texts, with hopes for further examination of both these and other literary accounts of contemporary madness and deviance.

The four novels examined in this thesis engage with the notion that an individual who carries out an extreme crime or who behaves in a way that is outside the realm of what is deemed normal must evidently be mentally unstable. The novels represent, from a variety of perspectives, the process of piecing together an account of the “mad” act as a means of understanding and making sense of what has occurred. The accounts in the novels raise questions about the construction of group or social accounts. Privacy is crucial to all of the novels - Engleby’s journal, Eva’s letters to her deceased husband, Barbara’s surreptitious manuscript and *Remainder*’s narrator’s account. (While this has less of an explicit form, it is private in that it is a hugely inner and psychological narrative that, for example, extends to cover the individual in a coma state). However, although the novels are all told from the private perspective of the individual they all represent the expressions, reactions and social or legal sanctions of the wider group.

Through an examination of the narratives that surround the deviant acts depicted in these novels it is clear that notions of madness and abnormality are equated with the anti-sociality denoted by transgressive behaviour. This is represented as a rejection of the social group on the part of the individual. Once the individual has committed the crime, the social response is to highlight all of the aspects of their personality that are perceived as abnormal and antisocial to underpin the representation of their madness. These aspects are always rooted in - and thus reinforce - the schism between the individual and the social group. One of the key features of the representation of the enigmatic mad individual is the definition of them in terms of their solitary nature – they are represented as existing at a remove from the rest of this society. The novels’ destabilising of these accounts of madness being represented as a rejection of the group serves to highlight the concealed nature of the way in which the group in fact rejects – by failing to account for – the ‘mad’ individual.

Anders Breivik's failure to garner any ostensible support for the ideological motivations to which he attributed his violent actions was a key factor that ultimately led to his diagnosis and his representation as psychotic. Although it was the committing of the act itself that led to this differentiation, once this had taken place, Breivik's representation as psychotic had overtones that took into account his entire identity and dubbed him non-human. Breivik's *delusions* of a network of peers and supporters was what was foregrounded in the depiction of him as a mad person, as opposed to his political beliefs, which would have linked him to existing minority groups. The mediated narrative that followed the events established him as a figure of fascination through the depiction of Breivik as singular, solitary and as a loner. The fascination that surrounds Breivik – and thus reinforces his otherness – is based on the identification of Breivik as being external to any particular group.

In *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, the protagonist's psychopathic act is contextualised in terms of the individual's rejection of connections with the other. Kevin rejects maternal connections from birth, his relationship with his father is depicted as a performance, and his only friend is described as someone over whom Kevin is able to exert control. Through a retrospective examination of his childhood, it is clear that the representation of Kevin as mad outsider is rooted in his solitary nature and refusal of the social. Eva's narration also establishes her own difference from the normalised social expectations of maternal and feminine experience. The narrative ostensibly serves as an examination of individuals who stray too far from these norms by outlining the shattering consequences of both Eva and Kevin's social rejections. In its examination of discourse and the use of metafictional tropes, however - as discussed further below - the novel does this in such a self-reflexive way that it in fact draws our attention to the implicit warnings that are subtly implied in contemporary media representation and child development

discourses. Ultimately Shriver encourages the reader to be aware of the ways in which these narratives function to protect against any drastic differences from the status quo.

The novels explore the fascination with the mad individual as being rooted in their incomprehensibility. *Remainder* explores the stock figure of the mad outsider through an examination of the course of the narrator *becoming* that character. The novel raises the questions of what constitutes normality and abnormality by testing the extent to which the reader can relate to and identify with the narrator. Throughout the course of the novel the narrator moves away from his position of victimhood - established early on through the description of his recovery - stretching the reader's sympathy and identification. McCarthy draws attention to the ways in which we approach and contextualise the abnormal figure. Essentially, as the narrator moves away from the position of victim of the ambiguous accident, he becomes less recognisable, less legible.

Madness is both thrilling and threatening because it treads the line between legibility and illegibility. On one hand we can't understand the motivations of the individual because they are no longer comprehensible to us, but on the other, madness is represented as something that can be understood and treated. The compelling nature of mad characters is rooted in both their profound otherness and moments of clarity. A feature of the fear that is provoked through the narrative of the mad individual is that they could in fact be reconfigured as very normal – meaning that their madness is in fact a verbal construct, and their mad acts are merely a choice. This is something that is conceivably possible within all humans – anyone can choose, at any time, to carry out a “mad act” - proving therefore that the harmonious existence of society is fragile. The vulnerability of society lies in the notion that we are a step away from annihilation through capricious choices. The act that Breivik carried out is defined in terms of its

monstrosity. In defining individuals such as Breivik as non-human, and certainly as non-normal, they are established as distinct and different from the rest of society, allowing the group to scrutinise the deviant figure. The narrative that surrounds the individual defines them in terms of their position as external from the rest of the “normal” social group.

The novels examined in this thesis tackle the problematic task of categorising and labelling the mad individuals at the centre of the novels. The eccentricities of the narrator in *Remainder* are accounted for by his extreme wealth, and his project requires his necessarily effective communication with and mutual understanding of a vast team of people. We see that he *can* engage effectively with others, raising the question of whether his otherness is an active choice that eventually becomes problematical for society. Similarly in *We Need to Talk About Kevin*, Kevin displays brief moments that indicate an emotional connection with his mother, despite the perpetual question mark over how genuine these moments are. Furthermore, Kevin is able to feign his role as dutiful son, brother or pupil, and is portrayed as having an acute awareness of what is expected of him socially. In many ways the individuals featured are not “mad” in the long-established sense of the term. Rather than being crazed and incomprehensible, the narratives offered by the individuals are coherent; they make sense and they have a grasp on the nuances of society enough to formulate the relationships and connections that are socially expected of them, to a certain extent. That is, while we see the individuals’ rejection of the social depicted in the novels, we also see them engaging in functional social relationships and roles.

The novels explore the representation of this either as an active choice to reject seemingly “healthy” or functional social relationships on the part of the individual or as an inability to connect with others as a part of, and indicative of a diagnosable flaw in,

the individual's personality. On one hand - as with the narrator in *Remainder* who refuses potential sexual and platonic relationships in favour of his obsession with his re-enactment project - the individual's choice to refuse to engage with the social group in a "normal" way is a feature of what defines their depiction as abnormal. Similarly, however, the uncomfortably awkward descriptions of both Engleby and Barbara's intense attempts to form relationships and their dramatically incorrect perceptions of the reactions of the other also emphasize their difference from social normality. By representing this as part of a flawed or even pathologically disordered personality, the individual is noted as weak, defined as a victim and thus any threat they may pose to social norms is diminished. Interestingly, abnormality and the suggestion of madness seems to be the same whether the individual is defined as choosing to reject normalised social connections or whether they are depicted as being unable to help it. What is crucial to note is the implied rejection of pre-existing social codes. Regardless of this being depicted as an active choice or something the individual has no control over, the individual is defined as a social outsider.

The thesis looks at how the mad or deviant figure is represented as the antithesis to largely undefined concepts of normality. A number of previous scholarly insights have considered this positioning of the mad person as an outsider. Many of these accounts consider notions of the mad individual as being cast outside of society, with origins in Foucault's conceptualisation of the issues of power at play in the confinement of madness in mental institutions.

In *Writing and Madness*, Shoshana Felman conceptualises madness as that which society excludes. Felman deals with nineteenth- and early twentieth century literary writing and its relation to the age of psychiatry, pointing out that 'not only has madness preoccupied many different disciplines but it has *caused them to converge*, thus

subverting their boundaries'.¹³⁴ She aims to question, from both the outside and the inside of a text, the ways in which the discourse of madness is denied:

Madness usually occupies a position of *exclusion*; it is the *outside* of a culture. But madness that is a *common* place occupies a position of *inclusion* and becomes the *inside* of a culture.// It is perhaps precisely this which marks the specificity of "madness" in our time, as what can designate at once the outside and the inside: the inside, paradoxically, to the extent that it is supposed to "be" the outside. To say that madness has indeed become our commonplace is thus to say that madness in the contemporary world points to the radical ambiguity of the inside and the outside, insofar as this ambiguity escapes the speaking subjects (who speak only to have it escape them). (Felman, p.13)

Considering the various modes of literary madness – the autobiographical accounts, reliable and unreliable narrators, thematic madness and madness as a metaphor for social dissidence - Felman seeks to ask whether we know what it is to talk about – and write about – madness.

This thesis develops the notion of madness as exclusion by considering the ways in which the mad or deviant individual's representation as abnormal reinforces the notions of normality that define the majority group. In doing this I show that the literary representation of this aspect of society reveals contemporary society's failure to account for each and every diverse aspect of human nature. This in turn draws attention to the profound ambiguities and inconsistencies in our treatment and understanding of the mentally ill. It is this which underpins stigmatisation.

Felman's work sets out to consider 'Why and how do literary writers reclaim the discourse of the madman, the pariah of society, and how does this reclaiming dramatize something essential about the relation between literature and knowledge?' (Felman, pp 2-3). This thesis extends beyond the notion that there are pearls of wisdom, profound

¹³⁴ Felman, Shoshana, and Martha Noel Evans. *Writing and Madness*. (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003). p.12

insights and deep truths to be found within the ‘ravings’ of the mad. Instead – as Felman suggests - by shifting focus from the discourse of the mad person to the social discourse *about* the mad person, a scepticism towards the very notion of madness in contexts of deviance can be explored. The label of madness, when applied to people who demonstrate psychological lucidity alongside antisocial behaviours, is increasingly being rejected.

This is a departure from – or an evolution of - the total rejection of the concept of mental illness espoused by the rhetoric of the anti-psychiatrists of the sixties. Szasz’s theoretical refusal of the notion of mental illness and its reconfiguration as “problems of living,”¹³⁵ for example, is challenging in that its denial subsequently also negates the possibility of much needed treatment for those who in contemporary contexts we can comprehend as evidently suffering from their mental disorder. Awareness of mental illness is a pervasive feature of contemporary culture, as is the acknowledgement that the misrepresentation and ill-treatment of the mentally ill can be severely damaging to the individual, and can lead to a wholesale stigmatisation.

While taking into account the facets of stigmatisation, this thesis nevertheless moves away from the needs of the mentally ill individual in favour of an examination of contemporary attitudes towards madness as mitigation for antisocial behaviour. The emergent field of health humanities demonstrates formal ways for works of literary criticism - in moving towards interdisciplinary scholarly work – to enable the application of literature to both inform and become part of therapeutic support. By promoting a discussion of the socio-cultural responses towards the representations of abnormality or deviance as madness that appear daily in the media, this thesis seeks to

¹³⁵ p11

ensure that prejudiced discourses are examined in terms of their impact on societal attitudes towards deviance, antisociality and mental illness.

Representational borderlines

Many of the problematic aspects of the representation of madness in contemporary culture arise when dealing with the borderlines between categories. The systemic binaries that have been established that lead to definitions and labels being applied to the human subject. Questions over whether an individual is mentally ill or criminally deviant result in profound ambiguity. In the “mad or bad” example, as we have seen, crime and sanity are linked; to be held fully criminally responsible, one must be deemed sane. Seemingly there is a contemporary socio-cultural rejection of the pre-defined categories into which the human subject is expected to fit. It is cases that denote individuals or events traversing the borderlines between categories that are often the subject of much media attention, fictional representation and academic debate.

As we saw in *Notes on a Scandal*, the symbolic expulsion of Sheba from her position within society to the realm of abnormality arose from a crime that straddled the arbitrarily placed borderline between adult and child. In *Engleby* we saw the problematic nature of the psychopathological categorising and the differing outcomes that were a result of his positioning on either side of the prisoner or patient binary. The novel raises questions about the terming of an individual as disordered, by highlighting the lack of “personality order” against which he can be contrasted. The personality disorder diagnosis – or the question of psychopathy – creates further borderline conflicts in a legal proceeding through the question of whether or not an individual can be held fully legally accountable as a result of their diagnosis. As we saw, personality

disorder constitutes the borderline between the legal and psychiatric systems, with neither quite knowing what to do with the personality disordered offender. The personality disordered individual thus radically problematises the social order by raising questions over whether it is in fact the individual who is unable to adhere to the socio-cultural norms and averages, or whether the structures that underpin society do not adequately account for all human subjects.

When Anders Breivik was dubbed psychotic and therefore not legally accountable for the crimes he committed, both the public *and* Breivik were outraged. Breivik was represented as so monstrously abnormal that he was differentiated from the rest of humanity, leading to a pathological diagnosis of this abnormality. As a result the direct consequences of Breivik's violent actions were altered. The vehement rejection of Breivik as "mad" by both the public and by Breivik himself in fact diminishes the symbolic gulf that is established through the discourse that surrounds him, leading to agreement and a shared perception. Breivik and the public were both in full agreement that to deem Breivik mad substantially detracts from the impact of his crime. This strongly highlights the increasing scepticism towards the contemporary narrative tendency to establish the mad individual as distinct from the rest of society.

The description of Kevin as adhering to the stereotypical image of high-school shooter mirrors the depiction of similar, real-life events in the media. Shriver's inclusion of factual references to the Columbine shootings, and to a number of other individuals who have committed equivalent crimes, demonstrates that these individuals are all described in similar terms – as loner figures lurking on the fringes of the group before carrying out monstrous and horrific massacres. While the representation of the mad other is in terms of their singularity, they are defined as recognisable and as adhering to certain representational conventions.

However, the quest for answers and explanations is the motivation for the narrative trajectory and is complicated by the narrative's concern with establishing the impact of his upbringing on his persona. The novel represents the litigation culture of contemporary America and positions it in parallel to Eva's need to explore whether she was to blame for Kevin's acts. We are denied access to Kevin's inner thoughts and feelings, and continually reminded that Eva's perspective constitutes our medium. It is through her that we interpret sinister moments and episodes of vulnerability alike, which substantially destabilises our confidence in reading, and knowing, what Kevin is. This displaces the quest for knowledge of the outsider, and draws the reader's attention to the way Kevin is represented.

In *Engleby* we are presented with an individual whose compellingly "other" characteristics underpins both his fascination as a character and simultaneously forms the basis of his rejection by the group. By representing the narrative process of constructing a diagnosis, Faulks exposes the structures that take place in labelling and categorising individuals. The metafictional aspects of this draw out the role of the reader. Engleby is re-established as the subject of the report that they are reading and is subsequently positioned therefore on the outside of the group that is created through the process of examining, scrutinising and ultimately diagnosing him. While the diagnosis purports to account for Engleby's otherness, the novel reveals that the process of diagnosis in fact reinforces this otherness by providing a psychopathological explanation for his behaviours and actions. In diagnosing his "abnormal" behaviours, thoughts, feelings and perceptions, Engleby is not defined solely by the act that triggered his psychiatric evaluation. His entire identity is defined in terms of disorder, in terms of its difference from the norms.

All four of the novels distinctly draw attention to their own construction. As we saw in Chapter Five, the narrative ‘breakdown’ in the novel explicitly signals to the reader that the account that they are reading is unstable and refuses narrative conventions. The novels all exploit the conventions of their respective literary modes to explicitly refer to the provisionality of the writing, and therefore draw attention to the process of constructing accounts of the human subject. Ultimately the novels thwart the readers’ expectations of the fictions by reminding them that they are reading a fictional representation of reality.

The notion of expectation is key, not only to appreciating the ways in which the authors disturb the process of reading a novel, but in examining the narrative probing of our expectations of the ways in which we understand people and the ways in which society deals with the problematic “mad other”. By drawing attention to these inconsistencies, and to the problems caused at the borderlines between categories, the novels destabilise our unreflective acceptance of the pervasive discourses that claim to unequivocally establish contemporary reality.

The structures that underpin contemporary societal reality are revealed as narrative structures with a social objective purpose – as will be examined further in the next section. The novels’ use of metafictional tropes results in making the reading process a challenging one by confronting our expectations. The novels engage with the lack of clarity and the problematic nature of the way in which we deal with the mad or transgressive individual. In doing this, they reveal the reader’s – and the individual’s – power to shape society by questioning, sceptically viewing, or even refusing, these symbolic accounts.

“Murder is a Man’s Business”

In attempting to locate appropriate novels to facilitate this examination of the representation of madness in contemporary fiction there was a noticeable imbalance in the representation of the male and the female “mad” outsider. While male examples of the mad individual were readily available in Engleby, Kevin and the narrator of Remainder, a female equivalent was difficult to identify.

There is a significant body of material on the representation of women’s madness in nineteenth century fiction (Logan, 1997; Lange, 2009). The most famous of these critiques is Gilbert and Gubar’s seminal work *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979). Gilbert and Gubar explore the women writers of the period in their work against the constraints of the patriarchal nineteenth century society. Gilbert and Gubar put forward the notion that writing by women of the era generally features characterisations of the “angel” or the “monster” figure. They identify that the female character was either perceived as adhering to patriarchal conceptions of femininity and thus viewed as angelic, or as rebelling against these roles and therefore represented as “madwoman”. It was important that this thesis considered contemporary differences in the representation of male and female madness to reveal that many of these patriarchal values, while less ostensibly present in society, are still very much underpinning the ways in which we view, discuss and understand masculine and feminine modes of madness and abnormality.

The representation of Sheba’s (borderline) transgressive act, as we saw in Chapter Four, highlighted this discursive inequality, and enabled an exploration of the representation of the media’s role in upholding the disparity. *Notes on a Scandal* also features one of the most commonly cited “mad” female figures in twenty-first century literature –

Barbara – who has actually been ‘diagnosed’ in one article as having psychopathic traits (Logan, 2011). Nevertheless, the deviant acts committed by both Sheba, and by Barbara - whose manipulation and deceit, while abhorrent qualities, are well within legal boundaries - takes place in the feminised domestic realm and is dealt with as scandalous but ultimately benign. In terms of the impact on society in comparison to, for example, Kevin’s high school massacre, the “mad” acts are at opposite ends of a representational spectrum.

A dominant issue in the field of gender studies has been the examination of the differentiation between the concepts of sex - the biological signification of male or female bodies - and gender - the identities construed by those differences and ultimately shaped by social and cultural influences. As Simone de Beauvoir famously summarised: ‘One is not born, but rather becomes, woman.’¹³⁶ De Beauvoir cites examples of women that ‘brilliantly demonstrate that it is not women's inferiority that has determined their historical insignificance: it is their historical insignificance that has doomed them to inferiority’. (De Beauvoir, p153)

In her seminal work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler problematises de Beauvoir’s distinction by challenging feminist critique’s attempt to examine the representation of women, charging feminism with the role of establishing precisely how the category of women is produced. She suggests that by establishing a universal female subject in need of better political, social and linguistic representation, feminism in turn parallels the universal male subject that has been at the heart of patriarchy. She says:

¹³⁶ Simone de Beauvoir, Constance Borde, and Sheila Malovany-Chevallier, *The Second Sex*, New edn (London: Vintage, 2010).

On the one hand, *representation* serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women.¹³⁷

For Butler, both terms (sex and gender) imply a ‘natural’ position on either side of the binary divide for an individual with the agency to ‘take on’ one gender role or the other:

Inasmuch as “identity” is assured through the stabilizing concepts of sex, gender, and sexuality, the very notion of “the person” is called into question by the cultural emergence of those “incoherent” or “discontinuous” gendered beings who appear to be persons but who fail to conform to the gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined. (Butler, p17)

Butler argues that gender is performative; that gender is the expression of certain attributes that are performed by the pre-discursive, sexless subject, as opposed to a subject who is or ‘has’ a certain sex, adopting the gender roles that have been culturally and denotatively constructed. By considering the constructed nature of sex and gender, and Butler’s claims to its fundamental performativity, we can reframe our understanding of cultural representations of man and woman, identifying and examining the ways in which gender is both constructed and performed.

One reason for the apparent lack of contemporary literary depiction of the equivalent mad female could be that she is simply not as pervasive an aspect of contemporary culture as her male opposites. Women who kill or commit heinous deviant acts are statistically much rarer than men and therefore potentially offer a narrower opportunity for representing a recognisable contemporary figure as subject matter. However, the phenomenon of the contemporary mad female appears to be increasingly attracting

¹³⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble : Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York ; London: Routledge, 1990).

academic and cultural attention with studies into female serial killers and female psychopaths (Gurian, 2009, Gavin, 2014) exploring her modes, methods and motivations, as well as the way she is perceived socio-culturally (Logan, 2012).

An examination of a final case study – providing a counterpart to the Breivik case that opened the discussion – allows an exploration of the way in which the contemporary deviant female is represented in the media. It resonates profoundly with the issues raised in this thesis and allows us to consider that the dearth of literary representation of the female psychopath may not merely be linked to a statistical minority but in fact points to a striking imbalance that feeds into and reinforces contemporary gender stereotypes.

In February 2014, Joanna Dennehy was sentenced to a whole-life term in prison, making her the third woman in British criminal history to be served this type of sentence (after the infamous killers Myra Hindley and Rosemary West) and the first to have the sentence ordered by a judge (Hindley and West's whole-life sentences were given by the home secretary).¹³⁸ In court Dennehy openly admitted her guilt to three counts of murder and two counts of attempted murder. As we saw with the four novels examined in the thesis, there was no doubt whatsoever about who had committed these deviant acts. The representation of these individuals as psychopathic, deviant and mad is very much rooted, not only in the acts they commit, but also in their failure to attempt to conceal their acts, or to demonstrate contrition once they are caught. These nonchalant attitudes give rise to questions about their mental or moral state: are they

¹³⁸ Dodd, V, 'Joanna Dennehy: serial killer becomes first woman told by judge to die in jail', 28 Feb 2014, The Guardian
< <http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/feb/28/joanna-dennehy-serial-killer-first-woman-die-in-jail> > [Accessed 25th April 2015]

unable to appreciate the wrongness of their actions or are they merely undisturbed by the perceived moral gravity of the acts they have carried out? As we have seen, this kind of debate is a staple feature of the discussion that surrounds the deviant individual in the media, and is an aspect of representation that the novels continually probe.

While Dennehy pleaded guilty - publically and defiantly owning the acts she had committed - the men who had been arrested alongside her pleaded not guilty to charges of preventing the lawful burial of the bodies, perverting the course of justice and assisting an offender.¹³⁹ Like Hindley and West, who were both arrested alongside their husbands, Dennehy's link to the men who were found guilty of acting as her accomplices has been fore-grounded in the media, suggesting that the notion of a lone female killer is both a statistically rarer (Gavin, 2014) than instances where men kill, and therefore a culturally alien concept. Research into the motivations of female serial killers often grounds them in qualities such as subservience or care, which are perceived to be feminised:

Some of the most notorious female serial killers are seen as subservient to their male partner, which feeds into the questions of normative gender roles. Some of these women have killed within partnerships; whilst they are viewed as monsters because they are women who kill, they are also viewed as less likely to be blamed for initiation of killing. Other female serial killers are described as either the comfort type, ones who provided services to those they killed, or as healthcare workers taking mercy killing a little too literally.¹⁴⁰

The female murderer is contextualised in the media by linking her to the men who must necessarily have encouraged, or influenced the deviance. In this context the role of the

¹³⁹ 'Peterborough ditch deaths: Joanna Dennehy pleads guilty', 18 Nov 2013, BBC News < <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-24987953> > [Accessed 25 April 2015]

¹⁴⁰ Gavin, Helen 'Evil or Insane? The Female Serial Killer and Her Doubly Deviant Femininity' in Hedenborg-White, Manon and Bridget Sandhoff (eds) *Transgressive Womanhood*. (Inter-disciplinary press, Oxford, 2014) p.51

men is to provide the physicality assumed to be needed for a woman to commit the crimes. Frequent reference is made to Dennehy's boyfriend "Stretch" whose 7'3" frame makes him one of Britain's tallest prisoners.¹⁴¹ An important focal point here is the media's operation in the mode of fiction. The accounts reveal the narrative tendency to report on any feature that can be deemed physically or psychologically abnormal, which increases both the fascination with and the mystique that surrounds these transgressive individuals. In this way their similarity to the normalised majority is diminished and their outsider status is reinforced. The assumption that a woman either would not or could not carry out such deviant and violent acts is implicit in the articles that depict both Dennehy and her male accomplices.

Dennehy's case, as well as the cases of both Hindley and West respectively, is treated with incredulity because of the gender of the perpetrators – statistically there is a rarity of instances in which women kill. However, despite the masculine presence acting as a narrative stabiliser offering a familiarity and aiming to preclude the notion that a woman was capable of carrying out the crimes alone, Dennehy was undeniably depicted as the sole perpetrator of the actual acts of murder. Dennehy is also represented as having an 'evil and malign' influence over her male accomplices. The jury was asked to determine whether her accomplices were acting under duress and were in some way frightened of Dennehy. The depictions are an invocation of the horrifically bizarre - the abnormally large figure under the control of his diminutive girlfriend, a sexually abnormal individual who traverses the gender boundary - and reveal the narrative strategies at play in the depiction of the scenario.

¹⁴¹ 'Joanna Dennehy accomplice Gary Stretch sentenced to life in prison', 28 Feb 14, ITV News <<http://www.itv.com/news/central/update/2014-02-28/joanna-dennehy-accomplice-gary-stretch-sentenced-to-life-in-prison/>> [Accessed 25 April 2015] - This article cites "Stretch" as Britain's tallest prisoner at 7'3", although other, similar online tabloid sites make reference to convicted burglar Christopher Lister who is 7'4"

The media response to this is the suggestion is that the feminist agenda of rejecting traditional feminine ideals is leading to women behaving like men, which ultimately results in extreme and catastrophic consequences. One article grounds Dennehy's killing in a context of cultural change, drawing a parallel between the rise of feminism post-1950's and the increase in masculine approaches adopted by women:

[T]he number of known female serial killers has increased significantly since the 1950s. What has also changed, in line with the changes in women's social roles, is the profile for women serial killers. These women are now wielding guns and knives whereas in the past they tended to use poison and other covert means of killing. The method of killing has become markedly more phallic and less associated with women's role as nurturers.¹⁴²

Dennehy is predominantly described in the media articles that discuss her as a 'female serial killer' as opposed to the ungendered label received by her male contemporaries. Gurian cites Hickey to highlight that the legal definition of a serial killer assumes the perpetrator to be a man:

For those in law enforcement, serial killing generally means the *sexual* attack and murder of *young* women, men, and children by a *male* who follows a pattern, physical or psychological (Hickey, 2006 in Gurian, 2009, italics in the original)

The emphasis of the female in cases such as Dennehy, therefore, is ostensibly included as a differentiation from this stock definition – a serial killer is defined as male so where women enter into this masculine realm it must therefore be highlighted as an inconsistency with the expected normative profile of a serial killer. However, the narrative that surrounds the female serial killer in the media, as we can see from the Joanna Dennehy case, does more than purely differentiate for the purposes of definition.

¹⁴² Covington, C, 'Joanne Dennehy: what makes a female serial killer tick', 10 Feb 2014, The Week.<
<http://www.theweek.co.uk/crime/57263/joanne-dennehy-what-makes-female-serial-killer-tick>>
[Accessed 25 April 2015]

It *reinforces* the association of the masculine with the realm of serial murder and in fact precludes social notions of normalised womanhood from being able to invoke the feelings of fear and threat – the cultural power – that the masculine confers.

The media articles published in the aftermath of Dennehy's crimes and subsequent conviction offer to answer the question 'why do women kill?' by citing social commentators and criminology experts who deem murder a 'man's business'.¹⁴³ The association of the masculine with violence and murder - and the converse exclusion of "normal" women from this - is explicit here. Dennehy's representation in the media is markedly gendered. She is defined as the antithesis of femininity. One article cites Dennehy's moniker as the 'man woman'. She is attributed with masculine qualities of excess drinking, drug use and promiscuity, as well as being violent towards her previous partner who eventually took sole custody of their two children.¹⁴⁴ The rejection of her maternal role further echoes her removal from notions of "normal" womanhood.

Perhaps the dearth of female psychopathic figures in contemporary literature represents this socio-cultural mindset. We see in the novels that many of the female figures such as Eva and Barbara are perceived as abnormal due to their distance from the feminine. Sheba is benign and the epitome of femininity – offering a comment on the cultural ideals of the feminine and its lack of social impact. While novels can push the boundaries of gender stereotypes – as with Eva's representation as a career-focussed and non-maternal woman – the notion of a deviant, evil or mad woman is too far from

¹⁴³ Holt, G, 'Dennehy murder case: Why do women kill?', 12 Feb 2014, BBc News
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-25040066>> [Accessed 25 April 2015]

¹⁴⁴ Fielding, J, 'Serial killer's distraught daughter is terrified she'll end up evil too, says her father', 24 Nov 2013, Express
<http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/444839/Distraught-Serial-killer-s-daughter-is-terrified-she-ll-end-up-evil-too-says-her-father> [Accessed 25 April 2015]

our mediated understanding of what constitutes woman, and conversely what constitutes man.

A comment piece on the Guardian newspaper's website proposes that Dennehy strives to self-mythologise, positioning herself as the protagonist in her own fictional outlaw story. This mythology is echoed by her public reception, which the article suggests is revealing of the 'palpable feeling of instant sexualisation about Dennehy's media profile that you just wouldn't see with a male murderer'.¹⁴⁵ The media's depictions of Dennehy's crimes are rooted in her sexual abnormality, serving as a way of reinforcing that she is an atypical woman with simultaneous undertones that create a link between her crime and her rejection of traditional modes of femininity. In the police station after her arrest, Dennehy is reported to have quipped, '[i]t could be worse; I could be fat.'¹⁴⁶ While the comment piece reads this as evidence of her self-mythologising, Dennehy's comment in fact directly aligns her abhorrent crimes with the cultural ideal of the superficial image of femininity.

Consultant forensic psychologist Kerry Daynes attributes violence in women to their own history of victimisation in childhood – although other articles cite Dennehy as having come from a 'loving home'¹⁴⁷. Daynes says that these types of abused women have 'pathological needs for attention, control or to express their anger' (Holt, paragraph 12 of 35). Dennehy was assessed by court psychiatrists and was found to have psychopathic, anti-social and emotional instability disorders. This was

¹⁴⁵ Ellen, B, 'Joanna Dennehy: Why do female serial killers get mythologised?', 2 March 2014, The Guardian
< <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/mar/02/joanna-dennehy-murder-women-sexuality> > [Accessed 25 April 2015]

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

¹⁴⁷ Peachey, P, 'Joanna Dennehy: The girl from a loving home who became a serial killer', 13 Feb 2014, The Independent
< <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/joanna-dennehy-the-girl-from-a-loving-home-who-turned-into-a-serial-killer-9124128.html> > [Accessed 25 April 2015]

characterised by the prosecution in the case as involving ‘traits that included superficial charm, a disregard for others, pathological lying and a capacity for showing no remorse, to exaggerate and lie’.¹⁴⁸ Dennehy was also diagnosed with paraphilia sadomasochism – defined as abnormal sexual desires, with Dennehy’s abnormality presenting in a desire to inflict ‘pain, humiliation or bondage’.¹⁴⁹ Both personality disorders – as discussed in detail in Chapter Two – and paraphilia are characterised by abnormality, by their difference from the norm. The diagnosis demarcates Dennehy as abnormal, neutralising any power implied by the acts she has carried out by pathologising her abnormality. In this way we can align Dennehy with the representations of characters like Engleby and Kevin, and approach her narrative description with the same scepticism that Faulks and Shriver encourage in their novels.

Daynes goes on to say that: ‘We will always be more shocked by the idea of a female serial killer because women are viewed as nurturers and givers of life. To repeatedly take lives [...] is seen as an aberration of nature’ (paragraph 35 of 35). By setting female killers up as the antithesis of their male counterparts, these media statements must be considered in relation not only to what they are asserting about women, but also to the opposing intimations about men. If woman is a nurturer and giver of life, to the extent that a woman who takes a life can be deemed ‘an aberration of nature’, man, therefore, is constructed in the opposite. Shock at a man killing is limited, not only because of the increased statistical frequency, but because of the cultural stereotypes that are being upheld – and reinforced by these discourses – about what constitutes woman.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Peterborough murders: Joanna Dennehy was mentally ill’, 23 Jan 2014, BBC News
 <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-25864992>> [Accessed 25 April 2015]

¹⁴⁹ Morris, S, ‘Murderer Joanna Dennehy diagnosed with paraphilia sadomasochism’, 28 Jan 2014, The Guardian
 <<http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2014/jan/28/murderer-joanna-dennehy-diagnosed-paraphilia-sadomasochism>> [Accessed 25 April 2015]

Allen highlights the more than doubled frequency for female offenders to receive a psychiatric disposal instead of penal ruling, and notes that women receiving a differential treatment from the legal and psychiatric services than that received by men, can be linked to a systemic emphasis on 'chivalry'. Allen cites – albeit carefully, as she views the feminist argument as too reductive and invocative of an all-encompassing patriarchy that is not applicable to an analysis of modern psychiatry - feminist commentators who:

interpret any objective lenience towards female offenders as merely a device whereby patriarchal agents attempt to obscure the potential power of women. The failure to punish women is seen as a means of denying or trivializing any threat women's action might pose to social order, and thus invalidating the political meanings of women's deviance (Allen, p.10).

From a feminist perspective then, far from being advantageous, being pathologised in fact contributes to the continued subjugation of women through the associations with the way power is conferred through crime. Woman is pathologised as a means of diminishing the threat she may pose to the social order through her deviant actions. Conversely, the monstrosity that is implied by male offenders serves to reinforce the supremacy of patriarchal values by positing deviant man as terrifyingly unfathomable. The overtly feminist argument is that by coding female experience as "mad" and male experience as "bad", any social power gained by women's deviant actions is neutralised and eradicated. However, less attention seems to have been paid to the inverse possibility – that of men as being coded criminal as opposed to psychiatrically disturbed undermining the development of a discourse of the male psychological experience.

The investigations into the motivations of female serial killers, while ostensibly upholding feminism as a central concern, in fact reinforce a number of heavily gendered socio-cultural codes. The statistical evidence that represents female serial killers as making up a significant minority of those who kill is used as justification for the patriarchal, foreclosed narrative strategies used to describe them. The narrative approach adopted by the media can be said to draw up lines of social demarcation that still, despite modern attitudes to gender equality, preclude women from certain 'male' roles. A man who kills is depicted by the media in terms of his monstrosity and abuse of power, but is never defined in terms of his gender. A woman, on the other hand, who carries out a similar act is characterised as a perplexing puzzle because she contravenes the typical notions of woman as victim and as incapable of horrific crime. Dennehy's assault on the codes of *what woman is* seemingly poses more of a concern to the media than the actual crime she has committed. The suggestion is that this kind of extreme and radical deviance is not an area for women to occupy. While on one hand the media claims to be merely reporting the statistical facts, on the other there is an overt narrative reinforcement of woman as weaker, more benign and less dominant than men.

Patently, the absence of a link between women and violent crime or murder is significant. Statistics and accounts that represent the *absence* or minority occurrence of violent crimes and horrific acts in any group are certainly positive trends. However, an examination of the explicit and alarming narrative strategies used in the media reveals the profound implications about gender in contemporary discourse that are perpetuating representational inequalities. While I have relied heavily on Girard's scapegoating model to draw attention to the group and individual theory that highlights social mechanisms at play, it is in fact a quote from Girard that epitomises the rationale behind

the exclusion of women from the realm of deviance. In response to questions about the gendered aspect of his work, Girard said:

If anything my hypothesis is pro-woman. It is peculiar how people moved by new ideologies want to be part of the power structure even retrospectively, and to be seen as responsible for some of the horrors that have left their mark on us. This greed to participate in the violence of men is incomprehensible to me (Williams, p.276).

While Girard seemingly can't comprehend why a woman would want to be a scapegoat in this manner, the scapegoat theory is exactly that which provides the opportunity to move away from the notion of violence being a purely masculine realm by understanding the patriarchy that underpins the power structure. As we can see from an examination of the media's discussion of Dennehy in comparison to her male counterparts, and in the examination of the wider contemporary attitudes to deviance and madness in this thesis, the violence of men equates to acute social power. By reinforcing the statistical picture that women don't kill with discursive truisms that unequivocally ground this in the cultural ideals of femininity, the notion that women don't have the power to make such a radical impact on or attack on society is subsequently also reinforced. While the statistics support the obvious fact that the female violent criminal character is simply not a pervading part of contemporary culture, the lack of appropriate novelistic representation of a woman in this role also highlights the extent of the power that is at stake when discussing the mad and deviant individual.

As we saw with Dennehy and the rationale for dubbing murder 'a man's business', the 'factual' or statistical evidence that supports the narrative methods is overwhelming,

making any questioning or challenging of the ways in which the mad other is depicted as problematic. The individual commits the extreme act, which is perceived as an attack on the bonds of the group. While an examination of the method of scapegoating the individual is possible, it is at the same time difficult and highly sensitive. Despite the notion of the scapegoat mechanism enabling us to reframe the violent crimes as being represented as symbolic attacks on the social order, the individuals' choices to reject social expectation and connection result in catastrophic consequences. Across the novels these are either the death of their victims, or, in the case of *Notes on a Scandal*, the crossing of the sexual borderline between teacher and pupil or adult and child. With the exception of *Notes on a Scandal*, the depicted acts themselves are extreme ones, contravening legal and moral boundaries and are committed knowingly, with full awareness of this breach, and ostensibly with little or no remorse.

However, the act itself is not what is at stake in the examination of the narrative that surrounds it. As we saw in Chapter Four, Girard outlines that in the scapegoat mechanism the perpetrator's guilt is not relevant to the identification of the mechanism in action (*The Scapegoat*, pp.20-21). Whether the scapegoated individual has actually committed the illegal or immoral act that has triggered their expulsion from the group has no bearing on the model that identifies the behaviour of the group and the ultimate result of a sense of unity being restored to the group. Similarly, the individual actually experiencing psychosis or symptoms of a mental illness when they are described in terms of madness is not fundamental to what is being examined. It is the role of the label of madness as a social tool that is significant. Of foremost importance are the ways in which the individual is labelled and categorised, and the ways in which the group responds.

Reading Outside

As we saw in the media articles that depicted Anders Breivik, one of the most troubling things about his self-justification was the resonance that it had with pervading aspects of contemporary discourse, such as right-leaning political stances and attitudes towards gender. While the extreme widespread physical destruction caused by the mad or deviant individual's acts of violence are shocking and upsetting, the fear and anxiety that underpins media representations lies equally in the notion that this individual may share his view of the world with "normal" individuals. The notion that an individual who commits such a horrific act is in fact quite legible and comprehensible raises questions about what would prevent a normal person from committing such an act, with events such as those that took place in Norway on 22nd July 2011 occurring on a regular basis. The mediatised discourse that surrounds these individuals arises out of this fear, and serves to both perpetuate it – signalling to society through an implied risk of recurrence the need to understand the moral gravity of this issue – and to quash the existential panic it has stirred up, by defining the individual as abnormal and, in fact, non-human. It is here that the relevance of Girard's theory becomes most apparent: scapegoating is the very means by which social panic is pacified. The media and socio-cultural discussion of the contemporary mad figure operates on the borderline between carefully constructed concepts that allows this discursive mechanism to take place. Through the symbolic expulsion of the deviant from the realm of the normal, normality itself is defined and those within that group unified. The four novels examined in this thesis encourage their readers to question – or refuse outright – this prescribed way of reading and discussing the transgressive individuals.

The diagnostic category of personality disorder problematises these constructed notions of normality and abnormality. It ostensibly claims to diagnose abnormal behaviour and

provide a psychopathological explanation for those individuals whose perceptions, thoughts and behaviours vastly differ from the socio-cultural norms. Through his examination of personality disorder, Faulks raises questions about the validity of the diagnosis and the impact it has on subsequent legal or psychiatric consequences. After reading Engleby as a challenging character who is depicted in terms of his otherness, and subsequently as a character who has committed a terrible crime we ultimately see the way he is processed and dealt with by society. Through the representation of this process of defining the character as legally and psychopathologically abnormal, Faulks prompts the reader to question the ways in which notions of normality are constructed. Socio-cultural norms are themselves defined and asserted through the process of expelling the transgressive individual from the group. Faulks signals to his reader that “normal” is thus defined as that which is not abnormal, as opposed to the definition being configured in the opposite way, encouraging them to reflect on the very nature of psychopathological definitions of individual human subjects.

Faulks reinforces this through his engagement with the diminished responsibility clause and its link with the contemporary “mad or bad” debate, which also shares similarities with the ways in which Shriver represents legal consequences of such extreme actions, for both Kevin and for Eva. Shriver and Faulks both raise questions about the interrelation of crime and mental state, which refuses the straightforward categorisation of illegal acts where the perpetrator is legally sanctioned accordingly. Instead, shocking, heinous or extremely violent acts often serve as a trigger point for the psychopathological diagnosis which in turn impacts the way the individual is perceived by the legal system. Both authors depict the notion that this redefinition of criminal status based on mental state as being perceived as beneficial to the transgressive individual, leading to them being reclassified in terms of patient, rather than prisoner,

and thus “getting away with” criminal behaviour. Both novels prompt the reader to consider “madness” and its contemporary representation as something that is constructed to manipulate outcomes, perpetuating the notion of the mad person as devious.

However the representations of the consequences of the legal trials for both of the novels’ protagonists shows that while the individual seems to have openly and knowingly committed a crime and “succeeded” in avoiding the penal consequences of prison, their change of status into “mad” person is not in fact as beneficial as it is initially perceived. Their patient status transforms them into a victim. They are marginalised in society through the process of using the “mad” or “psychopath” label in neutralising their transgressive attack on the status quo. The novels allow the reader to consider the stigmatisation of mental disorder in both law-abiding and law-breaking subjects. The reader is able to move away from the mediatised discourses of the “criminal” individual and consider them as subjects defined by social structures.

Girard’s scapegoat mechanism offers a framework for perceiving and examining these social structures. Reading *Notes on a Scandal* with this in mind allows a consideration of the extent to which Heller challenges the representation in media discourses. Heller’s novel questions the arbitrary line between adult and child, the social and cultural modes of masculinity and femininity, the borderline between public and private, and the way in which the media upholds gender, as well as other cultural stereotypes. Heller’s compelling tale of scandal and sexual misdemeanour is rooted in traditional notions of feminine ideals, and so its challenge to profoundly patriarchal discourses could be perceived as being – like the scapegoating mechanism – largely concealed. However, through her entirely “other” narrator, her subtle use of metafictional tropes and through the juxtaposition of the novel and media forms, Heller continually destabilises and

discomfits her reader. The reader is denied any single account with which they can align their sympathies or their comprehension of the events, forcing them to consider and question the mode of representation itself.

If the four novels being scrutinized in this thesis were placed on a spectrum of metafictionality, *Notes on a Scandal* would be at the more subtle extreme, with the novel's gentle nods towards its own fictional status being of secondary representational importance to the central themes of sex, betrayal, family and womanhood. *Remainder* would be placed at the opposite extreme. Tom McCarthy has no hesitation in employing techniques that serve, not only to alienate his reader (with the converse aim of heightened engagement), but to leave them entirely bewildered as to whether the novel they are reading can in fact be classified as a novel in the traditional sense.

McCarthy raises questions about normality - about what constitutes a normal man, a normal novel, a normal reader. Through an examination of fictional constructs, he makes his reader entirely uncomfortable, transforming their reception of the narrator-protagonist throughout the course of the novel and radically destabilising the reading process. Simultaneously McCarthy draws the reader into a collaborative process in which there is necessarily a rejection of the passive process of reading a novel, and instead an expectation placed on the reader to probe the contentious and contemporaneous issues being raised.

The authors raise unanswerable questions, or certainly questions with no universal or comforting answers or formulations. Ultimately the novels explore the notion of categorisation and ask these questions in a way that depicts the very compulsion of contemporary society to question, to understand, to seek answers and to build a narrative to explain the human subject, the human social group and any deviation from that model. These novels are resolutely political, considering both contemporary reality

and the process of representing and reading it. They are portrayals of contemporary culture that are difficult to formulate, often extremely challenging and cryptic, and while the authors are conceivably not in control of this at all times, their representation of contemporary society – and their questioning approach – nevertheless reveals these social structures that are often concealed. The four novels in this thesis exemplify the way that the contemporary novel form can facilitate an engagement with and above all ownership of the way in which the human subject is represented and understood.

Concluding Remarks

This thesis set out to examine the representation of madness, abnormality and deviance in contemporary fiction. An examination of the four novels featured here - using the case study of the media's depiction of Anders Breivik as a contemporary discursive reference - has facilitated an engagement with and a consideration of the socio-cultural role played by the narration of the "mad other". This encompassed:

1. An examination of the ways in which the diagnostic category of personality disorder is represented, and what this reveals about the discourse surrounding normality and abnormality in contemporary culture, as well as the categorisation of the human subject.
2. A discussion of the conflict that is established through the legal clause of diminished responsibility and how this creates the binary opposition represented by the popular "mad or bad" debate. This arises as a result of the preclusion of the mentally ill from full legal responsibility through the ostensible expression of sympathy or extenuation in a legal setting.
3. The hypothesis that these narratives can be seen to be concealing a wider social function which serves to protect the pre-established social conventions. This occurs through the selection of a scapegoat, who is symbolically expelled from the group – often through categorising, labelling or through establishing abnormality by contrasting it with the perceived normality. The mad individual is established as threatening and then this threat is discursively neutralised.
4. An exploration of the possibilities for the contemporary novel form to reveal these linguistic strategies and highlight the incongruities of contemporary

culture. The novel can also offer a vantage point from which to consider potential alternative social structures.

The Socio-Political Role of Literature

The four novels examined here are concerned with notions of social control and the reinforcement of or challenge to official cultures. In offering a questioning approach towards contemporary discourse – and by examining the compulsion to find comfort in definitive categorisations of the human subject – the novels prompt the contemporary reader to interrogate the systems that are being represented. These novels do not approach literary subversion by theatrically calling their reader to arms, but instead by empowering their inquisitive position and their responsive role. As Booker (1991) outlines:

After all, even the most transgressive works of literature do not in general immediately send their readers into the streets carrying banners and shouting slogans. Transgressive literature works more subtly, by gradually chipping away at certain modes of thinking that contribute to the perpetuation of oppressive political structures. As a result it is virtually impossible to document the actual political power of literature; about the only hard evidence we have of such power is the terror with which totalitarian regimes have traditionally regarded literary works that they deemed dangerous.¹⁵⁰

The novels all pose important questions about the nature of the deviant individual and contemporary social representation of that individual. Moreover, the novels signal the reader's role in the interpretive process. The authors' employment of metafictional techniques to continually destabilise the accounts that are being presented, functions to establish a dialogue with the reader. The contemporary reader of literary fiction is attuned to the process of adopting a sceptical approach to the reliability of narrative

¹⁵⁰ Booker, M. Keith. *Techniques of subversion in modern literature: Transgression, abjection, and the carnivalesque*. (Florida: University Press of Florida, 1991). p.4

representations. In utilising such metafictional techniques as explicit reference to chapters and to the process of constructing their own narrative accounts, the four authors of these texts clearly signal to their readers what is expected of them. The novels challenge readerly passivity. In making a link to real life accounts and clichés, the novels reflect and challenge the way in which the reader reads. In challenging this in a fictional context, the reader's mode of 'reading' outside of the novel is also brought into focus. By highlighting and challenging – or inspiring the reader to challenge - the deeply-entrenched social ideologies that are represented in the novels, the reader is fundamentally positioned to adopt a new response to these representations in 'reality'.

The socio-political potential of literature to subvert the power of established institutions or systems has been widely debated. In exploring some of the problems surrounding the subversive properties of literature, Booker suggests that, while the theme of transgression has seemingly become integral to literary discourse, the intricacies of many works have been perceived as having impeded their own subversive aim:

Many of the works that have been acclaimed as politically effective in this century have been so difficult and complex that only professional scholars seem able to recognize their radical potential, while these scholars themselves tend to work within a heavily institutionalized university environment that has itself – especially in North America – proved remarkably ill-suited as a locus for political action. (Booker, pp.3-4)

In being academically exclusive, literature that is thematically about transgression could in fact risk the impairment of its own subversive goal. In being too literary, too complex and even too subtle, the socio-political message could be lost. As we will see below, to attain its goals of galvanising a reader, a novel must refrain from making its own subversive aims too explicit. It is important for an author to strike an appropriate

balance; avoiding making these aims too obscure and thus alienating all but a scholarly audience. The novels examined in this thesis are popular texts and are thus aimed at a wider audience, posing the problem that in being anti-cliché and challenging genre fiction, there is an impact on interpretation. While there is a risk that the subversive aims of the novels may be lost, the authors' continually and determinedly destabilise their own narratives, persisting in drawing the reader's attention to their responsive role. The novels give credit to the lay reader's deductive abilities, and account for the freedom of their interpretation, which was a fundamental aspect of my selection of these particular texts for examination.

Through their use of self-reflexive techniques and their denial of – and in fact their profound interrogation of – the discourses that respond to the “mad” individuals depicted in the novels, what the authors draw attention to is *the process* of questioning and seeking answers. The novels problematise the ways in which society ‘deals with’ the transgressive individuals, but carefully and deliberately refuse to offer their own unifying narrative. Any attempt to do so would diminish the powerful representation of the epistemological fragmentation of contemporary society. The novels do not set out to explicitly formulate a profound and forthright indictment of contemporary psychiatric, legal or even media systems, but instead highlight to the reader the concealed cultural codes that underpin modes of contemporary discourse. In highlighting the reader's position through the use of metafictional techniques the authors simultaneously draw attention to the reader's own role in recognising, responding to, and challenging these codes. To this extent, the novels are bound up with highlighting the reader's potential to effect social change.

In his *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981), Habermas introduces three different types of speech act, highlighting the varying effects they produce and the degrees of subversive impact they can have. He differentiates between the locutionary – saying something; the illocutionary – acting, by saying something; and the perlocutionary – bringing about an effect by saying something.¹⁵¹ Colclasure (2010) ruminates on Habermas’s establishing of the distinction between illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts. He states that the latter extends further than the former, with the intent of perlocutions being based on the speaker’s intention and the effect of exacting action or change. He says:

An illocution is successful when the listener accepts an *assertion is true* or when the listener accepts an *appeal as correct*. In [a perlocution], acceptance grounds *obligations of action* on the listener’s part and *expectations of action* on the speaker’s part.¹⁵²

According to Habermas, the significance of a perlocutionary speech act is, therefore, both the effect that it brings about on the interaction between speaker and reader, and its concealed nature. Colclasure goes on to point out that ‘*perlocutionary goals cannot be revealed* if one wants them to succeed; *illocutionary goals are only achieved if one pronounces them*, i.e. makes them explicit.’ (Colclasure, p15).

The four texts examined in this thesis can be conceptualised as having perlocutionary goals. They aim to bring about an effect in which they challenge their readers’ passive acceptance of assertions or accounts of contemporary reality and highlight the expectation of action in the reader’s interpretation of the deviant figure and the ways in which (s)he is represented. If these aims were explicitly stated, however, or

¹⁵¹ Habermas, Jurgen. *Theory of Communicative Action*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987) pp. 288 – 289

¹⁵² Colclasure, David L. *Habermas and Literary Rationality*. (New York: Routledge, 2010) pp.14-15

unambiguously portrayed, they would not be attained. Only by revealing the intricate socio-cultural structures at play, and highlighting the reader's role within these structures, can the authors discomfit their readers to the extent that they are compelled to reflect on their own ability to accept or challenge this status quo. These perlocutionary aims, however, can only be attained by *implicitly* revealing and highlighting. The sophistication of these four novels in particular lies in their drawing of attention to the concealed nature of social discourse, both taking it as their subject matter, and employing it as a literary mode.

Habermas's theory provides a framework against which we can evoke the subtle, but nevertheless highly impactful, ways in which the four authors all highlight the role of the reader. Through the use of metafictional and self-reflexive tropes, the novels all denote the stock figure of the deviant individual that is so pertinent to contemporary cultural representation, but do so in a way that makes it impossible for the reader to merely accept these accounts as tales of an abnormal figure. The very process of constructing and – crucially in a Habermasian context – *defining* abnormality and deviance is foregrounded, signalling to the reader that there is an expectation of their interpretive responsibility contained within the novels.

According to Colclasure, literary rationality:

provides a singular kind of impulse in the public sphere at large, an impulse which consists in the public articulation – through language – of a paradigmatic and hence shared, or shareable, *experience*. This literary form of aesthetic rationality makes complex validity claims that motivate public discussion in a way unavailable to non-literary forms of communication. (Colclasure, p4)

The literary arena provides a representation of society that facilitates and encourages reflection on the actions and interactions of human subjects. It offers an opportunity to

engage with representations of the social by highlighting this shared or shareable experience that we – as a collective – have in common.

The notion of the literary public sphere as being characterised by this commonality reveals the problematic complexity of conceptualising what is at stake in the novels examined in this thesis. Hannah Arendt, in *The Human Condition* (1958), refers to the public sphere as ‘the common world that gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other’¹⁵³ This is a multifaceted concept. On one hand we can see the immense potential of the literary public sphere to invoke action in the collective literary readership. On the other hand, the very notion of a common experience is what is being challenged by these four novels. The novels raise crucial questions about whether a normative shared experience can include and account for every single *human* experience.

In this context the notion of the novel as public sphere is problematical – on one hand it is a way of describing the indubitable role of the novel as a form that has the potential to inspire socio-political action in its reader. The traditional dialogue between the novel and its reader is one of signalling and accepting the need for continually questioning and challenging the status quo. On the other hand it is an example of exactly that which it is rallying against – a way of establishing a commonality, a normalised shareable experience that ultimately cannot account for the idiosyncrasies of every single human subject.

¹⁵³ Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). p.52

Informing Approaches and Attitudes Towards Mental Health

Mindreadings, Femi Oyeboode's collection of essays, brings together a number of critical insights into the role literature has to play in the field of psychiatry. In the leading essay in the collection, Beveridge outlines the GMC recommendation that doctors be exposed to the humanities and to biosciences as a means of highlighting the perspective of patients that takes into account their emotional and existential aspects, which literature can offer to medical personnel (Beveridge in Oyeboode p2). It is evident that, despite debates that argue the irreconcilability of science and the arts, there is a common belief in both the scientific and the literary communities that the study of literature is of vital importance to clinical practice in offering a rounded account of the human subject. As Beveridge puts it, 'understanding and analysing a novel can be applied to the understanding of patient discourse. One can become more sensitive to the nuances and subtexts of a patient's communication' (Beveridge in Oyeboode p5).

Beveridge makes reference to the variety of different perspectives surrounding the nuances of the potential of literature to inform specialist approaches to mental health. Literature has been said to help inform psychiatrists and medical practitioners in the development of empathy (Downie, 1994). It has been perceived as allowing the psychiatrists to develop an insight into the patient's experience and the experience of their families through accounts that depict the psychiatric role (Porter, 1991). The role of literature in enabling clinicians to reflect on the ethical and moral implications of their practice has been considered, as has the 'additive' approach in which the arts is seen as supplementing existing medical knowledge (Evans and Greaves, 1999) or the converse 'integrative' approach that refocuses medicine to better understand the entirety of the experience of being human (Smith, 1999).

There are, of course, counter-discourses that suggest that literature is purely an aesthetic medium, and that the representation of the mad serves nothing other than a poetic purpose. Beveridge offers a balanced overview of the scholarly debate about literary potential in clinical practice, by including some of these opposing views: ‘Harold Bloom (2000), a distinguished literary critic, asserts that reading does not make us better, more caring people. It is essentially a selfish activity. It can expand an individual’s intellectual horizons but it does not engender altruism or increased sensitivity to others’ (Beveridge in Oyebode, p12).

As Beveridge points out, the widespread acceptance of the value literature can bring to the field is evidenced in numerous ways, including by the many medical schools in the UK which offer modules in the humanities. This application of the apparently divergent disciplines reveals the significant progress being made by twenty-first century interdisciplinary study to challenge the stigmatisation of the mentally ill. Considering the potential of the literary to subvert the ways in which we consider madness in a purely clinical context, while immensely important, can however be said to limit the remit of the literary to the medical field. In considering the ways in which, for example, fictional works support the development of empathy in a psychiatrist, we may miss the immense potential of the novel to go further, tackling contemporary figures such as Anders Breivik. How, one may ask, could a novel ever conceivably help us to develop empathy with someone like Breivik? The augmentation of clinical empathy for a service user by a psychiatrist is vital, but literature can go further, enlightening the widespread cultural understanding of madness for many members of society. As Oyebode puts it:

What is obvious is that madness and abnormal human experience and behaviour are of great interest to writers. Whether psychiatrists read them or not, these fictional accounts will undoubtedly influence how wider

society perceives mental illness, how they react to it and, ultimately, how governments respond by way of policy. Novels are revealing insofar as what is implicit in them, the unexplained and unexamined context, tells us something about the assumptions that cultures make about mental illness (*Emphasis mine*)(Oyebode, pp53-54).

Literature gives insights into inner lives and inner worlds, not only of the service user and their associated medical personnel, but of the lay person in their response to the multifarious representations of madness that are all around us. Rather than just informing clinical approaches to dealing with or responding to a psychiatric patient, novels such as the four examined here can aide all examinations of the agendas and socio-cultural controls that underpin representations of madness. The novels allow us to reflect on a whole-society approach to madness, in particular to the ways in which we discuss and narrate madness. In revealing the myths that are constructed to surround the deviant individual, literary fiction has the power to support us in beginning to consider the possibilities for new and multiple discourses about madness.

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